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Lisa Hanasono

Hyun Kyoung Ro

Deborah A. O'Neil

Ellen M. Broido

Margaret M. Yacobucci

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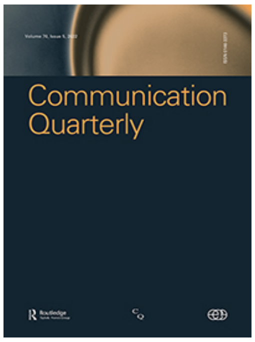
Author(s)

Lisa Hanasono, Hyun Kyoung Ro, Deborah A. O'Neil, Ellen M. Broido, Margaret M. Yacobucci, Susana Peña, and Karen V. Root



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Communicating privilege and faculty allyship

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ABSTRACT

As individuals who use their privilege to reduce prejudice, educate others about social justice, and actively stop discrimination, faculty allies can play a vital role in transforming universities to be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive. However, discrepancies persist in how faculty define privilege and communicate allyship. Drawing from standpoint theory, we examined discursive divergences in how 105 full-time faculty defined and experienced privilege and how they enacted allyship in the workplace. Participants tended to conceptualize privilege as a set of advantages and lack of structural barriers for people based on their group membership(s). Discursive differences emerged regarding the degree to which faculty participants perceived privilege to be un/earned and rooted in structural power, and some participants took ownership of their social privilege while others discursively elided it. When asked to identify specific ally actions, participants often described broad behaviors that aimed to help individuals in interpersonal contexts but did not address actions aimed at dismantling inequitable power structures, revising biased policies, and transforming toxic organizational cultures. Our findings highlight the need for trainings that clarify conceptualizations of privilege and help faculty translate their understanding of allyship into communicative actions that stop discrimination at interpersonal and institutional levels.

KEYWORDS

Faculty; allies; privilege; sexism; standpoint theory

Despite institutional efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), discrimination remains a widespread problem in higher education that disproportionately harms minoritized faculty, staff, and students (Ford & Patterson, 2019; Ogyunemi et al., 2020; Stolzenberg et al., 2019). For example, colleagues and students are more likely to question the competence of minoritized scholars (e.g., Niemann, Gutiérrez Y Muhs, & González, 2020), epistemically devalue their research (e.g., Settles, Jones, Buchanan, & Dotson, 2021), and make extra service requests of minorized faculty (e.g., O'Meara et al., 2017), which can exacerbate inequitable workloads, perpetuate prejudice, and derail minoritized scholars' career advancement. From discriminatory policies and practices to toxic campus cultures that permit the perpetuation of macro and microaggressions,

CONTACT Lisa Kiyomi Hanasono ✉ LisaKH@bgsu.edu School of Media and Communication, Bowling Green State University, 324 Kuhlin Center, School of Media & Communication, Bowling Green 43404, OH.

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institutions of higher education must continue to work proactively to dismantle discriminatory structures and advance social justice (Ahmed, 2012; Niemann, 2020).

Along with inclusive leadership, policy change, and grassroots activism, the actions of faculty allies can help universities and colleges become more equitable, diverse, and inclusive (DeVita & Anders, 2018; Patton & Bondi, 2015). DeTurk (2011) defined allies as “people who have relative social power or privilege and who stand against injustice directed at people who lack such privilege” (p. 570). Allies can reduce social biases, raise others’ awareness about social injustice, stop discrimination, advocate for more equitable institutional policies and practices, and provide social support to targets of prejudice (e.g., Czopp & Monteith, 2003; DeTurk, 2006; Nelson, Dunn, & Paradies, 2011; Sue et al., 2019). However, not all efforts to engage in allyship are successful. Some well-intentioned efforts may produce lackluster results; others can backfire, leading to retaliation, resentment, ruptured workplace relationships, and harm to those whom allyship is supposed to support (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020).

As social justice allyship becomes more pervasive and integrated into our everyday lexicon, its definition and usage are increasingly contested. Desnoyers-Colas (2019, p. 100) cautioned against “faux allies” who publicly espouse a commitment to diversity and equity but fail to acknowledge their own privilege or complicity in maintaining systems of oppression. Jones (2021) argued academia needs more accomplices (i.e., people who “work in solidarity with minoritized groups as they attempt to overthrow systems of oppression”) because allyship “can be wielded temporarily” and be used “for personal gain, often at the expense of qualified people from marginalized communities” (p. 3). Patton and Bondi (2015) revealed how some white men have enjoyed the benefits of being perceived as allies by others without actually “doing the work” (p. 503). Reason and Broido (2005) discussed “fair weather allies,” and Nuru and Arendt (2019) observed that some white women who claimed to be anti-racist allies enacted microaggressions like tone policing women of color. These dynamics raise questions of how faculty with privilege define what it means to be an ally and how their understanding of privilege influences the ways they plan to enact ally actions.

Drawing from standpoint theory, we examine divergent discourses embedded in how faculty members conceptualize and communicatively enact allyship in higher education. Specifically, we focus on discursive differences in how full-time faculty at one university discuss their social privilege and how they enact allyship to promote DEI at their workplace. Through our research, we address several important gaps in the literature. First, there is a dearth of research on faculty allyship, except a few studies (e.g., Anicha, Burnett, & Bilen-Green, 2015; Bilen-Green, Green, McGeorge, Anicha, & Burnett, 2013; LeMaire, Miller, Skerven, & Nagy, 2020; Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). The literature on allyship in higher education focuses predominantly on undergraduates and student affairs personnel. Understanding how faculty members discuss allyship can produce new insight on how professors can serve as agents of change to support their colleagues' career advancement, create more inclusive work and organizational climates, and transform institutions of higher education into more equitable workplaces (LeMaire et al., 2020). Second, our research advances communication scholarship on allyship that complements and extends literature rooted primarily in other disciplines such as higher education studies (e.g., Fabiano et al., 2003; Patton & Bondi, 2015; Reason & Broido, 2005), gender and sexuality studies (e.g., Case, 2012; Dessel, Goodman, & Woodford, 2017), psychology (e.g., Ashburn-Nardo, 2018; Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Ostrove & Brown, 2018; Sue et al., 2019), and sociology (e.g., Clark, 2019; Steinman, 2019). Our study also offers pragmatic benefits, as our findings can inform future trainings on allyship and provide a practical linguistic framework for discussing privilege and conceptualizing what it means to serve as an ally.

Elucidating allyship

Although researchers have used different terminology to discuss allyship, such as allies (Patton & Bondi, 2015), advocates (Anicha et al., 2015), or positive bystanders (Casey & Ohler, 2012), there are common themes in the literature about who allies are, what allies should know and do, and how they should enact allyship. Broido (2000a) defined allies as "members of dominant social groups who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social group membership" (p. 3), and many scholars follow this definition (e.g., Bilen-Green et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2019). Scholars have examined how allies have worked with members of minoritized communities to support social justice in myriad ways, such as reducing gender inequities and stopping gender violence (e.g., Chakraborty, Osrin, & Naruwalla, 2018), supporting the rights of LGBTQ+ people (e.g., Wessel, 2017), reducing racial discrimination (e.g., Sue et al., 2019), helping undocumented youth (e.g., Lauby, 2021), and advocating against ableism (e.g., Ostrove, Kornfield, & Ibrahim, 2019).

To act as an ally, individuals should be knowledgeable about core concepts like privilege, power, and oppression (Asta & Vacha-Hasse, 2013; Chrobot-Mason, Campbell, & Vason, 2020). However, awareness and knowledge are not enough; they must take action (DeVita & Anders, 2018). Allyship requires individuals to use their privilege to challenge oppression at all levels of society, including in interpersonal and institutional contexts (Broido & Reason, 2005). Such actions can include supporting members of minoritized communities, educating other people with privilege about equity and justice, and advocating for and creating change at organizational and cultural levels (Broido, 2000b).

Approaches to understanding and communicating privilege using standpoint theory

If allies are people who use their social privilege to reduce prejudice, stop discrimination, and create more socially just societies (DeTurk, 2011), allies must understand what privilege is and acknowledge how their own privilege operates from their specific social locations. Case (2012) explained that privilege "involves unearned benefits afforded to powerful social groups within systems of oppression" (p. 3). Informed by the framework of standpoint theory (e.g., Harding, 2004; Wood, 1994), which recognizes communication and experiences are rooted in subjective positionalities, we contend people's definitions of and discussions about privilege are shaped and reinforced by their unique perspectives, social identities, and social positions (e.g., their standpoints) within broader systems of power.

Initially, discourses about privilege tended to be *unidimensional*, meaning they focus on one privileged identity at a time (e.g., white privilege; McIntosh, 1988). Although this approach allows scholars to examine deeply how one social identity, such as race *or* gender, operates to systematically advantage some people over others, it can be too simplistic as individuals simultaneously occupy multiple social identities with varying degrees of privilege. For example, Carlson, Leek, Casey, Tolman, and Allen (2020) argued statements such as "all women are marginalized/oppressed" overlook the imperative of white women's allyship or solidarity with women of color (p. 890). Standpoint theory assumes that people hold simultaneously multiple social identities that may vary in terms of structural power and dominance.

A second approach to understanding and communicating privilege is *additive*. Windsong (2018) explained that "an individual's race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, etc. are assigned a score of either oppressed or privileged and then added together to achieve a score of oppressed/privilege" (p. 136). This approach provides a framework for identifying and discussing how people occupy social identities with varying degrees of privilege; however, it has received similar criticism to the unidimensional approach (e.g., Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1989; Rahman, Du Mont, O'Campo, & Einstein, 2020; Windsong, 2018; Yep, 2010). Specifically, both approaches dichotomize the privilege of allies and the marginalization of others, and they fail to account for complex interactions of privilege and oppression within allyship or solidarity work.

As a third approach, *intersectional* analyses offer opportunities to provide nuance and complicate how allies' varying degrees of privilege interface with marginalized identities in specific contexts. This approach requires allies to recognize and address the ways they experience different forms of privilege within broader systems of power (Anicha et al., 2015), and it challenges them to develop a standpoint where they are "critically conscious of the implications that come from occupying a particular social location" (Whittington, Bell, Otusanya, & D, 2021, p. 75). Although this approach offers a more nuanced conceptualization of privilege, it also demands a deeper understanding of the ways identities intersect within broader institutional and cultural systems of power.

Informed by the literature, we aim to understand how faculty conceptualize and communicate allyship. Our research questions are:

RQ 1: How do full-time faculty (a) define and (b) experience privilege?

RQ 2: How do full-time faculty communicate allyship at the workplace?

Method

Embracing a social constructivist perspective, we used an inductive approach (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) to understand how faculty (including faculty administrators such as department chairs and school directors) defined and experienced privilege and described potential ally actions.

Participants and procedure

A total of 105 full-time faculty (50 women, 51 men, 1 non-binary person, and 3 individuals who preferred to not disclose their gender) from a medium-sized public university in the Midwest region of the U.S. participated in this study. Reflecting the university's broader demographic trends, 75 participants self-identified as white while 22 participants self-identified as faculty of color. Eight individuals did not disclose their race or ethnicity. Our sample included 81 tenure-track faculty, 14 non-tenure track faculty, and 10 whose rank was undisclosed, from a wide range of disciplines including sciences, technology, engineering, and math (STEM, n = 48), social/behavioral sciences (SBS, n = 37), and arts, humanities, and pre-professional programs (n = 20).

This IRB-approved study was part of a larger grant project funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) that featured four-hour workshops on faculty allyship and bystander intervention. We used campus announcements and e-mail invitations to recruit participants. Approximately 2 to 4 weeks before each workshop, we invited participants to complete an online survey to measure their baseline knowledge, attitudes, and experience with faculty allyship. After clicking the online survey's link, participants read a consent form and were given the option to either opt in (n= 105) or out (n= 15) of allowing our research team to include their survey data in this study. In the survey, participants responded to several open-ended questions. Specifically, we asked them to (1) "define privilege," (2) "give two examples of how you experience privilege in your professional life," and (3) describe "what actions you might take as an ally to women and other marginalized groups in your work setting." Recognizing participants might not have cultivated an expansive repertoire of experiences enacting allyship, we intentionally designed the third question to focus on future ally actions. Each open-ended question was accompanied by a large essay text box for participants to share their responses. Although participants' responses ranged from a short phrase to 188 words per entry, the average length of their privilege definitions was 24 words, and the ways they described their experiences with privilege and allyship actions averaged 37 and 40 words, respectively. To protect participants' privacy, individual names and personally identifying information were removed from the larger data set that included participants' demographics and open-ended responses.

Author positionality

Our authorship team includes seven cisgender women faculty from disciplines in the natural sciences, social sciences, education, and business. Three authors are cisgender women of color, and team members hold a variety of ethnic, sexual orientation, caregiver, and disability status-related identities. At the time of this project's data collection, the authorship team included three associate professors and four full professors. Six of the authors are members of the institution where the data was collected; another was previously. All authors are members of a larger NSF ADVANCE Adaptation grant project that focuses on how inclusive leadership and faculty allyship catalyze gender equity at institutions of higher education.

As individuals steeped in the literature on allyship, as those who designed the program from which the data were collected, and as potential recipients of the allyship we were trying to develop, we were invested in participants' responses, even though the responses were given prior to the training. We also are habituated to definitions of allyship and have spent a great deal of time considering how faculty can act as allies. Our positionality and investment in the content may have led us to be particularly critical of participants' responses. Our differently disciplinary backgrounds also led us to expect different levels of awareness in the responses, with authors from STEM disciplines having lower expectations than those coming from the social sciences, where discussions of privilege and allyship are not uncommon.

Data analysis

Guided by our research questions, we used a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze our data. After individually reviewing and familiarizing ourselves with the full corpus of data, we came together to read through all participants' responses and generated an initial list of open codes related to how individuals defined privilege (30 initial codes), experienced privilege (25 initial codes), and enacted faculty allyship (21 initial codes). Examples of initial codes of allyship included "interpersonal" (e.g., preventing or stopping discrimination that targeted colleagues in interpersonal interactions) and "structural" (e.g., changing institutional policies and practices that perpetuate inequities). Next, we performed second-order coding to consolidate overlapping codes and to focus on dominant and marginal discourses in how faculty described and experienced privilege and allyship. For example, we noted discursive contradictions in participants' conceptualization of privilege; members speaking from the standpoint of dominant racial, gender, and occupational ranks were more likely to define privilege through a meritocratic lens (i.e., defining privilege as a byproduct of hard work and personal achievements) while minoritized faculty were more likely to discuss privilege in ways that were not predicated on one's work ethic or labor. In this iterative process of data analysis, we coded and produced memos individually and then came together to compare codes and discuss memos and preliminary analyses. Subsequently, we separated again to further analyze the data and then reconvened as a team until we reached a consensus on our coding, resulting in a final set of 3 themes that highlighted discursive tensions in the ways faculty defined privilege (i.e., advantages/lack of structural barriers, un/earned, and ir/relevance to one's minoritized status), 2 themes related to faculty members' experiences with privilege (i.e., degrees of difference in owning/eliding their privilege, unidimensional vs. additive), and 3 themes about enacting allyship (i.e., unspecified actions, individual or interpersonal actions, and structural allyship). Recognizing our research team's diverse positionalities and discipline-specific expertise, we met multiple times to engage in researcher triangulation, and the first author maintained detailed notes about the development and elucidation of themes. The first author also performed peer debriefing to further support the analyses' trustworthiness.

Findings

In this study, we aimed to understand how faculty members communicate core concepts pertaining to allyship. Specifically, our research questions aimed to understand how faculty (1) defined privilege, (2) experienced privilege, and (3) communicated allyship at the workplace. This section presents key findings and reveals discursive differences in faculty members' conceptualizations and communication of allyship.

Defining privilege

Advantages and a lack of structural barriers

In general, faculty described privilege as (a) a set of advantages and (b) a lack of structural barriers for a person based on their group membership(s). Participants stated that privilege afforded faculty with *everyday advantages*, such as experiencing more job security, having the authority to interrupt others in meetings and mundane conversations, receiving special treatment from colleagues, and having one's opinion and ideas considered seriously by colleagues and students. For example, a non-tenure track (NTT) Black woman faculty member defined privilege as "the power to speak and have your viewpoints listened to, valued, enacted, and celebrated." A white man who was a full professor explained that privilege meant "people will choose you to be on a committee or to chair a committee even when others would do just as well." Participants discussed how privilege afforded some faculty special benefits like better teaching schedules, favorable course evaluations, the right to vote on junior colleagues' promotion cases, and more freedom and flexibility in determining their research agendas.

Participants also described how privilege can be understood in terms of *not needing to navigate structural barriers and social biases*. For example, a white man full professor stated privilege was "the lack of external factors imposing one's ability to engage in chosen behaviors." Another white man professor explained, "No one asks you what you are doing here, anywhere that you go. You belong, just because of what you look like. Some things automatically go well for you that simply don't go well for women or minorities." Similarly, a white woman full professor stated that privilege meant "not having to police one's behavior . . . the luxury of going about one's business entirely unimpeded by having to consider others, and always receiving the benefit of the doubt in uncertain circumstances." Another white woman full professor explained that "to me, privilege is not having to think about your identity. When your gender, skin color, religion, etc. are not impediments to social professional interactions, you don't have to think about these things." From unquestioned authority and institutional belonging to not being harmed directly by discriminatory policies and others' social biases, having privilege was described by some faculty as allowing them to be less burdened by broader institutional and interpersonal barriers, thereby paving a smoother and more direct path toward career advancement.

Although faculty generally reached a consensus that privilege was characterized by a set of advantages, two discursive tensions emerged in their conceptualizations. Specifically, faculty disagreed about the degree to which privilege was (un)earned and the (ir)relevance of one's dominant or minoritized group status.

Un/earned privilege

Most faculty defined privilege as a set of *unearned* benefits that were associated with one or more group identities. A Black woman professor explained that "privilege is a system of unearned advantages provided by society to an identifiable group because of that group's identity and higher valuation in society." Put another way, a tenured Latino faculty member explained that privilege is "access to something just because of who you are –

not by talent, hard work, or other effort on your part," and another faculty member who did not disclose his race or rank defined it as "access to resources and opportunities that are unavailable to all by virtue of birth rather than merit." Collectively, these faculty members emphasized how they perceived privilege to be unearned and divorced from individual actions, work ethic, and abilities.

In contrast, there was a small yet significant group of participants who defined privilege through a meritocratic lens. They perceived privilege as *something that people earn* through their hard work, decisions, and individual accomplishments. For example, an Asian man professor stated that "privilege may be experienced because it is earned (e.g., a promotion)." Some faculty explained that the right to vote on junior colleagues' tenure or promotion cases was a privilege they deserved due to their advanced career rank and research records. A tenured white man faculty member explained, "In the workplace, privilege may arise as a consequence of both seniority and a demonstrated expertise in a particular area of endeavor." For these participants, privileges were afforded to people because of their knowledge, skills, choices, and individual accomplishments.

Ir/relevance of one's minoritized status

Another discursive tension related to the degree to which faculty members connected their conceptualizations of privilege to broader systems of power. For some participants, privilege was something that *could be experienced by anyone – regardless of any minoritized or dominant identities they might hold.* In other words, these participants did not explicitly state that privilege was a byproduct of a dominant group membership. For example, a white woman defined privilege as "a right or advantage someone might have" while another faculty member described privilege as "an entitlement to resources." Relatedly, some participants acknowledged that privilege stems from group memberships but did not explicitly connect privilege to membership in dominant or minoritized groups. One white man who was an associate professor, for example, stated privilege was "preferential treatment derived from identity." He acknowledged privilege is determined by one's social group membership. However, he did not indicate if a person needs to be a member of a dominant social group to experience privilege.

In contrast, some faculty explicitly believed a person's minoritized status could be connected to privilege. However, within this discourse emerged two divergent themes. Most participants defined privilege as *an entitlement based on or byproduct of membership in one or more dominant social groups.* An NTT white woman faculty member explained, "In general, [U.S.] society tends to benefit the white and male, particularly when comparing a pool of candidates." A tenured white woman faculty member noted:

> Privilege is the ability to benefit from the historical context that has created a power structure where white European males are the dominant groups, and those are unconsciously believed to be the default characteristics of "good citizens." Having any of those attributes can protect one from discrimination and bias, and it confers benefits that help advance the person who is privileged. It's like a cloak of invisibility . . .

In sum, most faculty members explicitly connected privilege to a person's membership in one or more dominant social groups. However, a small group believed being a member of a minoritized group afforded specific privileges. For example, a tenured woman of color believed she experienced privilege when she "was invited to apply for administrative positions (deans and chairs) because of [her] race and gender." In another example, an Asian faculty member stated, "When there was a minority-based fellowship . . . I applied and got it." Collectively, these faculty participants connected privileges to membership in minoritized groups.

Experiencing social privilege

We invited participants to share how they experienced privilege in their professional lives. Two themes emerged. In this section we reveal two divergent discourses in how (1) faculty affirmed or elided ownership of their privilege and (2) the degree to which their experiences with privilege were unidimensional or additive.

Ownership

Faculty members' responses varied widely in terms of the extent to which they acknowledged or owned their social privilege. We identified four distinct groups of participants. The first group indicated *they were not aware of the ways they had experienced privilege*. Three participants, including a white NTT woman, a tenured white woman, and an NTT white man stated variants of, "I'm not sure I have personal experience [with privilege]." A white woman full professor stated, "I am sure I have experienced privilege, but don't remember now." Although these participants might have experienced privilege at the workplace, they had either not reflected on this concept before, had not noticed how it manifested in their professional lives, or could not articulate their personal experiences with privilege.

The second group *explicitly acknowledged at least one form of privilege* they had experienced as a faculty member. Participants discussed a vast collection of advantages such as financial security, full-time employment, intellectual freedom, perceived authority from colleagues and students, access to resources, employment-related health benefits, being trusted by students, and not being adversely impacted by students' biases on course evaluations. Notably, many forms of privilege manifested communicatively. For example, a white woman associate professor indicated she experienced privilege by "having tenure, where I can *speak up* with less fear of job loss than when I was pre-tenure." A white man professor explained, "People listen to what I say and consider it with an open mind. People who don't know me welcome me to whatever social or professional gathering I enter." A white man associate professor shared, "As a native English speaker, my teaching reviews are automatically higher," and a white tenured man remarked, "As a white person, I'm often given the benefit of the doubt in various settings. When I raise concerns, I'm not apt to be written off as an 'angry' person." This group of people identified myriad ways that they experienced social privilege, and many of these forms were connected to benefits they experienced while communicating with colleagues and students.

The third group did not focus on the ways they experienced privilege. Instead, they *discussed experiences where they observed other people enjoying various forms of privilege*. Some participants identified how their colleagues experienced privileges that they could not access. For example, a woman faculty of color stated, "I regularly see the expressed opinions and desires of white cismen given priority over the words and opinions of women and people of color." In another example, a tenured white man noted that "the dept. chair deliberately disregarded [a woman colleague's] achievements for a young investigator award and nominated a much less deserving [but more privileged] candidate." A tenured Latino professor observed that "a privileged colleague may have a pick of a class or schedule before others," and an NTT white woman faculty member explained that "students tend to give male instructors higher evaluation scores than female instructors. Instructors with an American accent are often favored by students over those instructors for which English is a second language." One white man at the rank of associate professor observed that "when a member of a marginalized/disadvantaged group (women, ethnic groups, etc.) is making a presentation, members of the dominant/advantaged group are more likely to interrupt her/him." Taken together, these examples reveal that even when faculty did not explicitly acknowledge their own privilege, many were actively observing and making mental notes about the ways that privilege impacted their professional lives and systemically benefited some colleagues over others.

The fourth group *described how their lack of privilege had negative consequences*. Members of this group often held at least one minoritized identity. They shared examples of how they were interrupted frequently by privileged colleagues, how they experienced disadvantages on the job market, how other faculty discounted their research, and how they were excluded from decision-making meetings. An Asian man faculty member shared that he "may need to put more effort to connect with students in class than the faculty members who were born and brought up in the USA." One white man professor stated, "As someone who comes from a poor, working class background, I'm confronted with the easy privilege that comes from colleagues who are second-generation academics (or at least second-generation) about the nature of academic work." For this group of participants, their lack of privilege was salient, and they noted how it negatively impacted their professional identities and work. Although most examples focused on a lack of privilege related to race, ethnicity, nationality, class, or gender, some NTT faculty discussed experiencing employment precarity and a lack of professional privilege. For example, a white woman stated, "My non-tenure track status comes with a certain amount of de-professionalization against me … I do not have professional privilege." Another NTT faculty member who was an Asian man disclosed that he "could not get a decent job position as other people do." These experiences highlight how minoritized faculty members, including those without tenure, experience different challenges and a lack of benefits that may impede their professional success and career advancement.

Unidimensional or additive

Recognizing that faculty members hold multiple identities and experience privilege from different standpoints, we took a closer look at the data to determine the extent to which their experiences with privilege were intersecting, additive, or if they tended to focus solely on one social identity. Most faculty discussed their privilege in unidimensional terms, meaning that *their responses emphasized one privileged social identity* such as being white, a cisgender man, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied, older, tenured, upper middle class, *or* a U.S. citizen. For example, a man observed, "As someone raised in a middle-class family, I was able to afford college, which led to graduate school and ultimately a faculty position." This participant focused predominantly on how class-based privilege supported his career path. In another example, a Black woman shared, "I have cisgender privilege, which means that unlike trans colleagues, I am able to use restrooms without fear of being misgendered and people don't get my pronouns wrong when addressing me." This participant's example focuses predominantly on her cisgender privilege instead of simultaneously addressing intersectional or additive forms of privilege.

Given the focus of the training on allyship and bystander intervention, it was unsurprising that multiple participants discussed their gender privilege as men. A man with tenure who stated, "My merit scores for research are consistently higher than those of certain female colleagues, despite the fact that they publish more and have more grants than me." He also noted, "When I have volunteered to teach a class … my chair declines so as to 'protect me' … and then assigns the class to a female colleague who is already teaching more than I do." A white associate professor remarked, "I'm a man. Most people in my subfield are men. My status in the subfield is less likely to be questioned because 'it makes sense,'" while another white associate professor stated, "As a man, I have experienced privilege when students and other employees have been more willing to accommodate my needs and interests than . . . they do for women." And an assistant professor stated, "As a male, I never worry [about] expressing myself. I can object to those who are higher position than I am such as to the department head or the dean." In each of these examples, participants attributed professional advantages and benefits to their male privilege.

Participants also focused on their racial privilege as white faculty at a predominantly white institution. Several observed that their racial privilege allowed them to "blend in" with the rest of their white colleagues. For example, a white woman associate professor indicated, "I am surrounded by people who look like me because I am white and thus have access to more mentorship and homophilous community members." One white man associate professor remarked, "As someone who is white, when I talk about issues of inequity, privilege, and discrimination within classrooms that are largely white, I am not as easily dismissed as having a personal agenda." A white woman professor said, "People assumed I got my position because of my abilities and experience rather than because of my race." Collectively, these participants acknowledged ways they experienced white privilege.

Alternatively, when faculty discussed multiple privileged identities, they tended to take an additive approach – thereby missing opportunities to examine how their identities intersect in meaningful ways. Our analyses revealed a pattern where faculty addressed each form of privilege as a separate, discrete entity instead of discussing how their privileged and marginalized identities intersect, intertwine, and produce new meaning. In other words, they would discuss one privileged identity and then comment on a different privileged identity. For example, a white man professor wrote, "I am an older faculty member, so that does come with a certain amount of privilege." Next, he wrote, "I am a tenured faculty member, so I am mostly free to express an opinion without fear of retribution from colleagues." In this example, the participant chose to discuss privilege associated with age and then privilege associated with tenure.

Enacting allyship

We invited participants to describe how they would enact ally actions at the workplace. In this section, we discuss three themes that emerged from the data.

Unknown or unspecified actions

First, some participants stated explicitly that they did not know how to serve as an ally. For example, a white woman who was an NTT faculty member stated, "I am sure there are more ways to be an effective ally. I'm just not sure what they are." Similarly, a woman who was a full professor shared, "I'm not sure [how to engage in allyship]." Thirty-one participants provided very broad and unspecific examples of ally actions such as "I'll speak up or say something," "[I will] interact and get involved when necessary," "[I will] talk/discuss with other colleagues," or "[I'll] provide opportunities at all levels for equal inclusion." Our findings suggest that some faculty might not know specific ally actions they could enact in the workplace.

Individual or interpersonal actions

Second, there was a group of participants who identified specific ally actions. Their responses had a predominant focus on *actions that operated at individual or interpersonal levels*. At the individual level, participants focused on how they could educate themselves, increase their self-awareness, interrogate their own biases, stop committing microaggressions, and complete additional professional development training to act as stronger allies. For example, a pre-tenured woman of color noted, "First, I need to learn different type(s) of microaggressions and how to respond in those instances." A tenured white man planned to "consciously refrain from speaking first in conversations or interrupting others." Another white full professor indicated he planned to "acknowledge and apologize when I engage in microaggressions or other discriminatory acts," and a pre-tenured white man planned to "consciously stop saying 'you guys' when referring to a mixed gender group." A white woman professor wrote:

> Participation in professional development activities (an ongoing commitment to such work) that provide opportunities for me to educate myself on current policies, practices, and pragmatics of advocating for marginalized groups—including [a] recognition of the ways in which I may be unintentionally contributing to or serving as an obstacle for advocacy and equality.

These examples highlight participants' commitment to enhance their self-awareness, professional development, communication skills, and empathy to serve as allies.

In addition to focusing on self-improvement, faculty discussed how they could enact specific ally actions in interpersonal contexts. Several participants described how they might respond to others' discriminatory behaviors. For example, a white woman professor would "speak up when I hear and see microaggressions," and a tenured woman of color pledged to "tell someone I am working with that the language they want to use to describe someone is sexist and patronizing." A white woman associate professor said that she planned to:

> Interrupt the interrupters. Men frequently interrupt women in faculty meetings or at conferences, and I can speak up when this happens and call it out. Ask minorities for input during meetings when they tend to be silent or ignored.

Participants also discussed how they might provide social support and work to center the voices of marginalized faculty. For example, a tenured woman of color planned to "help amplify people's voices, making sure that those who historically have been most silenced have space to speak and be heard." Several colleagues expressed interest in establishing new mentorships, collaborative research projects, and promote the work that women and other minoritized faculty are doing. Recognizing how people's prejudice inequitably harms women faculty and faculty of color, some faculty indicated that they would engage in allyship by simply listening to their minoritized colleagues and providing safer spaces for the exchange of social support.

Largely missing: structural allyship

Participants identified few examples of how faculty could enact ally actions at a structural level. In other words, most faculty focused on how they could help their colleagues respond to microaggressions and reduce individuals' prejudice, but few addressed actions that could be taken to create sustainable shifts at an institutional level and make organizational policies, practices, and norms more equitable and inclusive. The participants who identified examples of ally actions at a structural level tended to focus on shifting hiring practices and policies to diversify their university's workforce, advocating for more equitable workloads so that minoritized faculty are not performing disproportionately larger amounts of service, creating more inclusive parental leave and tenure clock stoppage policies, increasing the representation of minoritized colleagues in prestigious leadership positions, closing gender salary gaps, and exposing discriminatory and abusive behavior by supervisors and those with institutional power.

Discussion

Our analyses led to three primary findings. First, most faculty defined privilege as social benefits (advantages and lack of barriers), although their understanding of how those benefits are obtained differed. Second, their articulation of how privilege manifests in their professional lives varied extensively and were informed by their standpoints; and finally, faculty focused on enacting allyship in interpersonal contexts, rarely addressing structural forms of oppression. These findings highlight the perils of assuming a common language and conceptualization of privilege and allyship among university faculty and offer concrete guidance for developing allyship trainings that effectively elicit, probe, and challenge these discursive differences.

Definitions of privilege

Participants in this study shared, with few exceptions, a definition of privilege as a set of (a) advantages and (b) lack of structural barriers and social biases. There was meaningful variation, however, about whether privilege is an earned or unearned consequence of social group membership. The former understanding aligns with colloquial and dictionary definitions: privilege is something a person earns through hard work, specialized skills, or meritorious achievement. The latter aligns with connotatively different definitions developed by members of social justice communities. McIntosh (1988) recognized two forms of privilege: unearned entitlement ("positive advantages"), and conferred dominance ("permission to escape or dominate," p. 10). Most participants in this study shared similar definitions.

Who was perceived to have privilege also varied. Most participants defined privilege as *an entitlement or byproduct of membership in one or more dominant social groups*. However, some offered different definitions, including omitting any reference to social identity groups, mentioning social identity groups but not acknowledging privilege as exclusive to those in majoritized groups, or labeling privilege as a consequence of being part of a minoritized social group.

These divergent understandings indicate that even among faculty who volunteer for a training on allyship, there is little consensus on how privilege relates to social identity; a clear definition of how the term is used in the context of equity and diversity training is required. Our findings make clear that to avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to explicitly define the nuanced vocabulary used in trainings focused on equity, inclusion, and justice issues. Moreover, conceptualizing privilege as a set of *unearned* benefits may help people – especially those from dominant groups – dispel the belief that privilege is purely meritorious, recognize how privilege operates on broader structural levels, and be better positioned to act as allies.

Experiencing privilege

Faculty participants in this study differed in how much they explicitly recognized and took ownership of their privilege and the degree to which they understood their privilege from an intersectional lens.

(Not) Owning one's privilege

Unsurprisingly, given their different definitions of privilege, participants expressed varying levels of recognition of privilege in their own lives. Some participants acknowledged having at least one form of privilege. A second group stated they could not think of any ways in which they experienced privilege. A third group focused instead on their experiences of marginalization and their absence of privilege. Finally, a fourth group elided the issue of privilege in their own lives and described how privilege impacted their colleagues' experiences.

Providing an academic definition of privilege differs from identifying how it influences one's own life; researchers have pointed out the many challenges people experience in becoming aware of their own privilege (Davis & Harrison, 2013; Goodman, 2011). Given that all participants in this study were full-time faculty, even participants with multiple marginalized social identities likely held occupational, educational, and economic privilege. Thus, many participants' denial of privilege in their own lives likely reflects a lack of ability or willingness to see their own privilege. They may also conceptualize privilege solely in more frequently highlighted categories of gender and race rather than occupational, educational, or economic privilege. Thus, an important aspect of developing faculty allies should be helping them to understand how they personally benefit from privilege (Goodman, 2011) and encouraging them to reflect critically on their standpoints by "understanding the power implications that result from social group membership and social locations" (Whittington et al., 2021, p. 75).

(Not) Recognizing intersecting identities

In their written responses, most faculty addressed only one aspect of their privileged identities at a time, considering each as a separate, discrete entity, rather than identifying the ways in which those aspects of privilege influenced each other. Although many participants discussed multiple privileged identities, it was rare for them to examine how their identities interacted; rather, they would discuss one privileged identity and then comment on a different privileged identity. There was limited discussion of how their privileged and marginalized identities interacted, intertwined, and produced new meaning. That said, participants were not prompted explicitly to consider how their identities interacted. These findings align with Carlson et al.'s (2020) argument that multiple aspects of privilege are rarely considered simultaneously. Recognizing how subjective positionalities are a complex combination of intersecting identities within broader systems of power (Crenshaw, 1989; Harding, 2004), our findings underscore the need to complicate how people conceptualize and communicate their standpoints and privilege.

Multiple scholars (e.g., Mizock & Page, 2016; Reason et al., 2005) have called for the recognition of the complexities of identity, noting that most people have both privileged and marginalized social identities, that some of these identities may shift over a life course, and that all are socially constructed (Mizock & Page, 2016). It is rare that someone holds solely privileged or solely marginalized identities. Thus, ally work is most often done by individuals experiencing both privilege and marginalization. We saw little recognition of this complexity in the participants' responses. One participant talked about acting as a white ally to her colleague, a woman of color. However, even in this case, the participant focused on her own privilege as a white person, not addressing the role of gender in the interaction. Congruent with standpoint theory, these findings suggest that faculty should be encouraged to consider simultaneously different aspects of their social identities, their relative social power, and the implications of simultaneous privilege and marginality and its influence on ally efforts.

Acting as allies

We found participants' responses to the question about actions they might take as allies somewhat surprising for three reasons. First, the fact that some of our participants were unable to describe specific ally behaviors they would enact suggested that, for them, allyship may be a construct that exists on a more abstract than concrete level. Because our participants self-selected into our allies training, we expected they were committed to the notion of allyship. However, based on our findings, there seems to be a disconnect between *wanting to* and *knowing how to* be an ally. Training may help these faculty develop the requisite skills and agency to move allyship from concept to action. Faculty development trainings that provide concrete examples and opportunities to practice allyship behaviors should be a high priority.

Second, when participants provided examples of allyship actions, their descriptions were focused almost exclusively at individual or interpersonal levels rather than structural, systemic, or institutional levels. Such actions as increasing one's self-awareness and standing up for a colleague who is being talked over or interrupted can be helpful. Unfortunately, allyship enacted solely at intra- and interpersonal levels does little to change the overall structural inequities that continue to marginalize women and other minoritized people (Carlson et al., 2020; Patton & Bondi, 2015). Furthermore, limiting allyship to individual and interpersonal actions by dominant group members re-centers extant social hierarchies through problematic practices like white saviorism and civility (Rudick & Golsan, 2017), and an adherence to multicultural neoliberalism which overemphasizes individual actions and meritocracy and "ignores larger social systems and ideological constraints" (Lawless & Chen, 2017, p. 240) The individual approach is analogous to that of "fixing the women" (O'Neil & Hopkins, 2015; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Sullivan, 2011; Wittenberg-Cox, 2013) rather than transforming patriarchal and racist systems that continue to afford fewer opportunities to women and underrepresented minorities than it does to white cisgender men. It is not minoritized faculty who need to be fixed but the structures and systems that result in clogged career pipelines, lack of opportunity, and limited senior leadership roles for women and under-represented minorities (Ahmed, 2012; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2015). Institutionally directed allyship targeted at breaking down obdurate structural barriers and discriminatory policies are needed, especially by privileged faculty and administrators, to make higher education more equitable. Being an ally is more than being nice or civil; effective ally work will bring the ally into contentious relationships with others in power and require sacrifice of status, resources, or other forms of privilege (Patton & Bondi, 2015). None of these dynamics were expressed by the participants in this study, suggesting that training about ally behaviors should encourage participants to view and engage with systemic forms of oppression, affirm their agency to go beyond interpersonal allyship, and prepare them for negative personal consequences resulting from that engagement.

Finally, the participants who described the actions they would take as allies did not explicitly connect or frame those actions with any recognition or discussion of their own privilege. There seemed to be a disconnect between the actions one would take and the recognition of the privilege (or lack thereof) that would put one in the position of being able to act (or not). Perhaps this can be explained by the contradictory responses of our participants to the questions of defining and experiencing privilege. Privilege was defined as both earned and unearned, as afforded to members of both dominant and minority groups, or altogether immaterial to group membership. There were divergent views on the experience of privilege, with some participants not acknowledging their own privilege but viewing others as privileged, and some expressing concerns about being targeted due to their lack of privilege. If allyship behaviors are dependent on the actions of those in privileged positions, the lack of recognition of one's privileged status and the connection between that status and one's ability to stand up for others may render the entire enterprise of allyship more challenging. Trainings should include opportunities for participants to articulate connections between their privilege and ally behaviors.

Limitations

We acknowledge certain methodological limitations and delimitations inherent in our study. First, our participants self-selected to our workshop rather than being selected at random from faculty across the university. Because faculty self-selected to participate, we might expect all attendees, no matter their initial familiarity with the subjects of privilege and allyship, to have more of an interest in these topics than that which exists in the general faculty population. There also are cultural limitations with our single-institution sample. Our sampled university's faculty is overwhelmingly white; thus, we cannot claim that a diversity of views is represented in our findings (although our participants were less likely to be white [~77%] than the institution's faculty as a whole [~84% white]).

In addition, the data we collected were self-reported by participants responding via an open-ended text box on an online survey rather than participating in in-depth interviews which would have afforded opportunities for probing, clarification, and follow up questions. Writing responses to questions on an online survey likely resulted in more brevity and less exposition than a semi-structured interview would have done.

Future directions and concluding thoughts

Given our findings and the limitations, we recommend three areas for further exploration. First, expand on our findings by conducting a broader, multi-institutional study of privilege and allyship with faculty from multiple disciplines. Also, randomly recruit faculty rather than relying on self-selected participation. Second, ensure methodological triangulation/differentiation by conducting follow up research with our participants. This should include interviews and surveys to test the efficacy of workshops intended to train faculty on defining and enacting allyship behaviors. Finally, it will be interesting to explore whether the timing of this initial study influenced our findings. Our data collection spanned December 2018 through January 2020, with analyses conducted in 2020, a year of immense social and cultural upheaval in the United States. We wonder if the changing and challenging sociopolitical landscape will permanently shift faculty understanding of allyship or whether activism will fade once life returns to some semblance of "normalcy." By elucidating faculty members' understandings of allyship and privilege, the findings of this and future studies can help those seeking to expand faculty allyship to create trainings with greater attention to developing shared definitions and strategies for institutional change as well as personal support.

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Notes on contributors

Lisa K. Hanasono (Ph.D., Purdue University) is an associate professor in the School of Media and Communication and affiliated faculty member of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program and American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University.

Hyun Kyoung Ro (Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University) is an associate professor of Counseling and Higher Education at the University of North Texas.

Deborah A. O'Neil (Ph.D., Case Western Reserve University) is a full professor in the Management Department at Bowling Green State University.

Ellen M. Broido (D.Ed., The Pennsylvania State University) is a full professor in the Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs and an affiliated faculty member of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program and the American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University.

Margaret M. Yacobucci (Ph.D., Harvard University) is a full professor of Geology in the School of Earth, Environment, and Society at Bowling Green State University.

Susana Peña (Ph.D., University of California, Santa Barbara) is an associate professor of Ethnic Studies in the School of Critical and Cultural Studies and an affiliated faculty member of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program and American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University.

Karen V. Root (Ph.D., Florida Institute of Technology) is a full professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Bowling Green State University.

ORCID

Lisa Kiyomi Hanasono http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6525-718X
Hyun Kyoung Ro http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1266-9345
Deborah A. O'Neil http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3969-8605
Ellen M. Broido http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7574-4096
Margaret Mary Yacobucci http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1950-0622
Karen V. Root http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2450-8207

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