

ALLY SKILLS WORKSHOP

[Client]

[Date]

Presented by Kendra Albert

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

EVENT/MORE INFO ON LOCAL
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

SAFER SPACE RULES

- You may leave or return at any time, for any reason, without explanation.
- This workshop is not recorded.
- Everyone is here voluntarily.
- Please anonymize if you repeat sensitive stories.

WHO AM I?



- Technology lawyer
- Teaches at Harvard Law School
- Out non-binary person (they/them please!)
- Trans feminist

AGENDA FOR TODAY

- Why practice ally skills?
- Ally Skills: Using the Right Words
- Ally Skills: Reducing Microaggressions
- Ally Skill: Responding in the Moment
- Scenarios
- Break
- Scenarios
- Wrap-up and general tips

**WHY SHOULD YOU PRACTICE ALLY
SKILLS?**

TERMINOLOGY

- **Privilege:** an unearned advantage given by society to some people but not all
- **Oppression:** systemic, pervasive inequality that is present throughout society, that benefits people with more privilege and harms those with less privilege

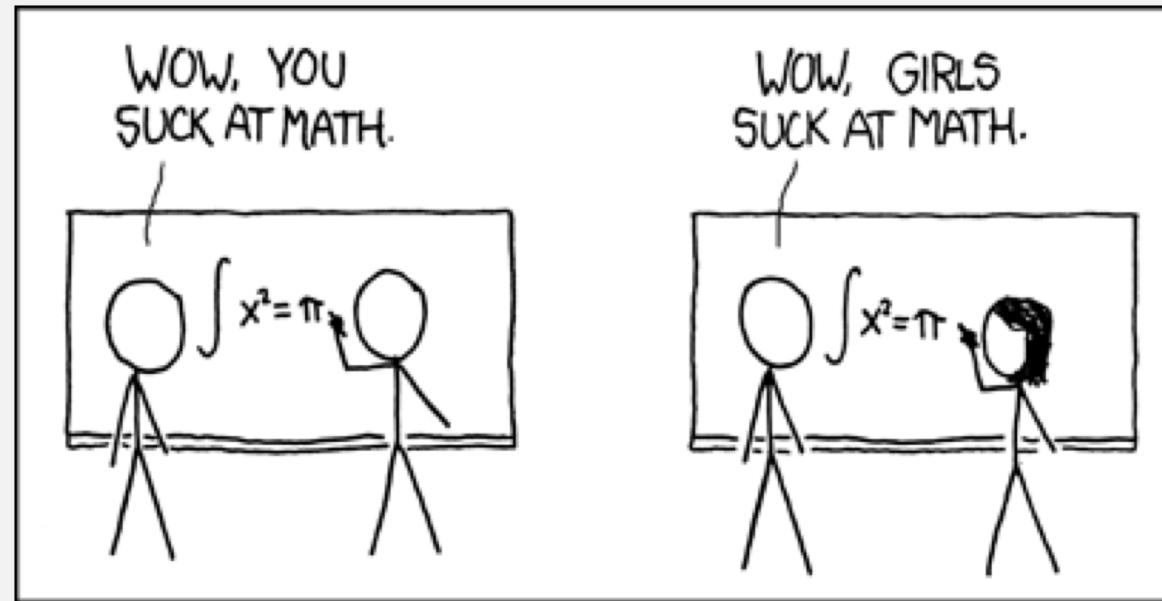
TERMINOLOGY

- **Target:** someone who experiences oppression (also called "a member of a marginalized group")
- **Ally Skills:** The practices of working to end oppression and reflecting upon one's own privilege

CATEGORIES OF PRIVILEGE

- White
- Male
- Cisgender (more later)
- Straight
- Not disabled
- A legal resident or citizen
- Specific ages
- Certain height/size/shape
- Not a mother (sometimes)
- Not a caregiver
- Educated
- Technically experienced
- Wealthy (can be earned)
- From an upper class family
- From the Global North
- And many more...

EXAMPLE



EXAMPLE

- **Privilege:** Being able to fail and have one's failure not seen as representative of one's gender.
- **Oppression:** The way in which individual women in computing are often seen as representative of women as a class, meaning that their failure is often attributed to their gender rather than obstacles caused by sexism or a lack of individual success.

EXAMPLE

- **Target:** A woman in computing
- **Ally Skills:** Learning about barriers women face in technical fields, reflecting upon how men may not experience those barriers, providing concrete support to women in science, and working to debunk gendered myths about innate differences.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH PRIVILEGE?

- **Don't get defensive!**
- **Understand our own privilege.**
 - By...reading, listening, reflecting, and noticing.
- **Work to end oppression.**
 - By...calling out oppressive behavior, pushing for structural change, giving money to causes, etc, etc.

WHY SHOULD PEOPLE WITH PRIVILEGE TAKE ACTION?

"[...] Ethnic minority or female leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are penalized with worse performance ratings; whereas [ethnic majority] or male leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are not penalized for doing so."

David Hekman, Stefanie Johnson, Wei Yang & Maw Der Foo, *Does valuing diversity result in worse performance ratings for minority and female leaders?*, <http://amj.aom.org/content/early/2016/03/03/amj.2014.0538.abstract> (2016).

WHY ELSE?

- People with privilege may be in the majority.
- People with privilege are not usually accused of “sour grapes.”
- Members of target groups usually have to do the work whether they like it or not.

It's the right thing to do.

SITUATING ALLY SKILLS



Go that way!

ALLY SKILL: CORRECT TERMINOLOGY

WHY DOES TERMINOLOGY MATTER?

- Using the wrong terminology can be a form of microaggression – it reminds folks that they don't belong.
- Taking time to learn shows respect.
- Correct terminology makes people more comfortable and often can pave the way for other opportunities to practice ally skills.

CAUTIONS RE: TERMINOLOGY

- It's very rare that everyone will agree.
- Members of any marginalized group can agree to call themselves whatever they want (outsiders should not assume they can use the same terms).
- Preferred terms change over time and based on location.

GENDER

- **Cis/Cisgender:** your gender is the same as the sex that was assigned to you at birth
- **Trans/ Transgender:** your gender is different than the sex that was assigned to you at birth
 - Note that transgender is an umbrella term that includes lots of different identities!
- **Non-binary or genderqueer or agender:** "male" or "female" doesn't describe your gender accurately, or you don't identify with a gender at all

GENDER: HANDLING PRONOUNS AND TRANSITION

- **Do:** check in if you're unsure about pronoun use or how to navigate a transition.
 - **Do:** assume retroactivity unless told otherwise.
 - **Do:** use current preferred pronouns for famous trans people (like Coraline Ada Ehmke).
 - **Absolutely don't:** ask about transition logistics or surgery.
 - **Absolutely don't:** out the person.*
- *Unless they're already publicly out or you've been given express permission.

GENDER

- Use **they** instead of "he" for third person singular pronoun of unknown gender.
- Terms for groups of people of particular genders: **men** for cis and trans men, **women** for cis and trans women, **non-binary people/folks**, **cis men**, **trans men**, **cis women**, **trans women**, **people of all genders**, **folks**, **people**, **everyone**, **all**, **y'all**, **all y'all...**

GENDER: AVOID USING...

- **Girls** for women 18 years of age and over.
- **Guys** for groups that are not all men (say "everyone" or "people").
- **Ladies** - associated with "proper" (i.e., subservient) behavior.
- **Females** for humans as noun.

GENDER: AVOIDING USING...

- **Transsexual** - not inclusive of all trans people, only use if someone uses it for themselves (and be careful, even then)
- **People with [BODY PART or CHROMOSOME]** instead of "men" or "women"
- **Transgendered / “a transgender”** – it's an adjective, not a verb or a noun

RACE AND ETHNIC GROUPS

- People of color, white
 - Note: skip “women and people of color”
- Black, Latina/Latino/Latinx, Asian, Asian & Pacific Islander (API), south Asian, east Asian
 - Note that these are overall group categories and belie significant differences in experience.
- Native Americans for indigenous peoples of mainland U.S (specific tribe is preferable if known).

RACE AND ETHNIC GROUPS

- Distinguish between race, citizenship, and ethnicity.
 - Race – overall social categories that are used as a shorthand for particular experiences within particular societies. (e.g., Black, Asian)
 - Citizenship – where a given person has formal governmental ties (e.g., a citizen of the United States, a citizen of Japan)
 - Ethnicity – subgroupings that have a common cultural tradition (e.g., Yoruba, Ainu)

RACE AND ETHNIC GROUPS

- Generally, more specific is better.
- Use the term(s) for each ethnic group or race that the majority of that group prefers that outsiders use.
- Don't use "dog whistle" terms to refer to ethnic groups indirectly - "urban" or "ethnic."
- Don't make generalizations about food, jobs, religion, citizenship, immigration status, languages, hobbies, etc. based on race.

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SEXUALITY

- **Straight:** women attracted primarily to men or men attracted primarily to women
- **Gay:** men or women attracted primarily to people of the same gender as themselves
- **Lesbian:** women attracted primarily to women
- **Bisexual and pansexual:** people attracted to people of any gender
- **Queer:** a useful catch-all term for people who don't fit easily into "straight cis woman" or "straight cis man"

DISABILITY

- Generally use **abled person or non-disabled person, disabled person, or person with disabilities.**
- More specifically, use the words and spelling that an individual person prefers – for example, **deaf** vs. **Deaf**.
- Only use respectfully in cases of self-disclosure:
ADD/ADHD, OCD, autism spectrum, schizophrenic, bipolar...
- **Don't use terms as nouns:** an autistic, an epileptic.

DISABILITY

- **Don't use euphemisms or judgmental terms:** "special needs," "differently able," "mentally challenged," "wheelchair bound," "suffers from...," "victim of..."
- Don't use words historically associated with diagnosis: **lame, dumb, stupid, crazy, retard**, etc. Instead use "foolish," "thoughtless," or "inconsiderate." Or a specific adjective like "crowded," "disorganized," or "annoying."
- If someone has not disclosed a diagnosis to you, it's best to describe behavior rather than label the person.

RELIGION

- Speak respectfully about religious or spiritual beliefs, especially those that are not practiced by a majority.
- Do not conflate religion and race. For example, Judaism* and Islam are religions, not races.
- Take time to learn about religious beliefs that you do not share, especially with regards to dietary restrictions and holidays.

CLASS

- "First generation" is a preferred term in many academic settings for people who are the first in their families to attend higher education,
- Don't use terms like redneck, trailer trash, ghetto, etc.
- Name your own class/wealth level accurately, especially historically.
- Don't use stereotypes about people with lower income jobs (e.g., janitor), adults of particular ages, family role (mother, grandparent, etc.)

ALLY SKILL: REDUCING MICROAGGRESSIONS

WHAT ARE MICROAGGRESSIONS?

- Small actions or comments that remind targets of their oppression/outsider status
- Can be intentional or unintentional
- Cumulative effect can be trauma.
- Acknowledgement of differences between those with privilege and those without are not microaggressions.

WHAT IS “MICRO” ABOUT MICROAGGRESSIONS?

The term “microaggressions” was coined by Chester M. Pierce in 1970, but was re-popularized in 2007 by a piece called *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice* by Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin.

- Microaggressions were contrasted with “macroaggressions” - things like lynching and slavery.
- Can be useful to divide into two categories:
 - Microassault/microinsult (“you are inferior”)
 - Microinvalidation (“you’re wrong about reality or the nature of oppression”)
- Can think of microaggressions as the personal level manifestation of particular biases, whether held consciously or not.
- There isn’t great holistic data on the prevalence of microaggressions in the daily lives of adults (most studies focus on college campuses).

GENDERED MICROAGGRESSIONS

- Office housework being assigned primarily to women and feminine-presenting folks
- Telling women to smile
- Judging women based on appearances, e.g., praising a woman's appearance in a professional context
- Asking trans people about their body parts or gender assigned at birth

RACE AND ETHNICITY-BASED MICROAGGRESSIONS

- Asking "where are you from?" out of context
- Claims to racial truth/experience: "I've always thought of myself as [race]."
- Calling a person of color, specifically a Black person, "articulate"
- Colorblindness: "I don't see color"
- "I have [race] friends."

SEXUALITY-BASED MICROAGGRESSIONS

- Assuming that a person's partner is a different gender
- Assuming because a person's partner is a different gender, that they are straight
- Calling a queer person's partner their “friend”
- Calling a person's sexuality a phase
- “I know another gay person!”

DISABILITY-BASED MICROAGGRESSIONS

- Asking intrusive questions: “were you born this way?”
- Assuming helplessness: not asking for consent before engaging in “helping” behavior, e.g., pushing a wheelchair or carrying materials.
- Suggesting medical interventions or that certain disabilities should be “cured”: “have you tried yoga?”
- Assuming that disabilities are visible or ugly: “but you’re too young to be disabled!”

WHAT IF I MAKE A MISTAKE?

*Apologize, correct
yourself, and move on.*

ALLY SKILL: RESPONDING IN THE MOMENT

DECIDE

- Am I the person in the situation who will face the least blowback?
- Is anyone else likely to speak up about this?
- Can I get consent from the target?

RESPOND

- Be short, simple, and firm.
- Don't try to be funny.
- If person is not well-meaning or likely to be defensive, focus on the audience.

REFLECT

- Ask yourself, is there something I wish I had known? How can I learn it?
- Once you've responded in the moment, consider whether structural changes are appropriate.
- Practice simple responses.

DON'T MAKE IT WORSE

- If possible and if there may be consequences for them, get consent from the target of a oppressive behavior.
- Be prepared to take on consequences.
- Don't rely on stereotypes or reinscribe oppression in your response.

PRACTICE SCENARIOS

HOW TO...

Remember, we're
practicing simple
responses!

- Focus on how to respond to incidents as an ally in this specific incident, not as the target or in the general case.
- Avoid rules-lawyering: "But what if there was some specific highly unlikely circumstance in which this situation was not actually bad?"

DREADED GROUP CHOOSING

- Form groups of [] people.
- Introduce yourselves BRIEFLY (1-3 sentences) and include your pronouns.
- If you end up in a group with a direct supervisor/report, switch groups.
- At the break, please change groups.

GATEKEEPER AND REPORTING OUT

- Choose a gatekeeper to interrupt people who are speaking too much and ask people who aren't talking as much if they want to speak.
- At the beginning of each scenario, choose someone to report out at the end (this person should change).

SCENARIO I:

In a team meeting, you notice that Jane, your female colleague, got interrupted in the middle of suggesting an idea. When you reflect in the moment, you realize this happens a lot.



*"That's an excellent suggestion, Miss Triggs. Perhaps one of
the men here would like to make it."*

REFLECTING...

- Who is speaking most in your group?
- Is someone having difficulty being heard?
- Are there patterns related to gender, race, age, or anything else?
- How do these discussions compare to ones you have in other contexts?

SCENARIO 2:

In a small group conversation you're in at a networking happy hour, a male authority figure makes a joke about how much sex another male authority figure must have had in order to have so many children.

Everyone is holding an alcoholic drink.

WHO MAKES IT AWKWARD?

- Responders often worry about "making it awkward," "upsetting people," or "causing drama."
- The person who made the problematic comment made it awkward.

*“Appalled silence is too
easily mistaken for
assent.”*

Jennifer Peepas

BREAK TIME

Remember to change groups!

SCENARIO 3:

On an organization wide email list, a administrator sends out a reminder about a new origination-wide policy requiring captioning for all videos that are posted online.

A senior employee responds to the list with a long rant complaining that the issue is “not relevant” and the captioning is too expensive.

SCENARIO 4:

You're a manager reviewing a round of peer feedback for two employees of yours.

In the peer feedback on your white male employee, you see words like “engaged”, “opinionated”, and “passionate.”

In the peer feedback for your black, female employee, you see words like “aggressive”, “harsh”, and “angry.”

OPPRESSION IS INTERSECTIONAL

Intersectionality -The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise. The term was coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw based upon the work of the Combahee River Collective and Patricia Hill Collins, among others.

“Just because you’re talking loud and animated doesn’t mean you’re arguing. But I make an effort to tone it down, not say it as pointedly as I would, add some levity to the situation, just because women are perceived as being aggressive if they speak quickly and loudly and Black women are perceived as being negatively aggressive if they speak quickly and loudly. For men it’s a sign of strength. For us it’s a negative sign. I try to keep my tone of voice light, slow down my speech, and rephrase things.”

Charisse Jones & Kumea Shorter-Gooden,
Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America (p. 97).

SCENARIO 5:

Your organization is hosting a recruiting lunch at a conference. As you review your social media mentions after promoting the event, you see a post from @hijabidev “Wow, [ORGANIZATION] claims to care about diversity but is hosting a recruiting lunch during Ramadan. Guess I’m not going there. Fucking hate islamophobic bullshit.”

PARALLEL UNIVERSES TECHNIQUE

Use only for marginalized folks!

- Summarize the target's behavior as non-judgmentally as possible.
- Spend 5 minutes brainstorming all the possible explanations for the behavior, starting with the ones that would explain it in the most “reasonable” way.
- Look over your list. Are there explanations that you brainstormed that would change your approach?
- Adapt your planned response accordingly.

WHAT IF I SCREW UP?

- Listen to the person.
- Validate and apologize. (Apologies cost nothing.)
- Don't take it personally.
- Look into how to do better.
- If responding on behalf of an organization, emphasize concrete steps taken.

WRAP UP

NEXT STEPS

- Don't expect praise and credit for fighting inequality. There are no “ally points.”
- Follow and support leaders from target groups (monetarily).
- Assume targets are knowledgeable about their oppression.
- When you make a mistake, apologize, correct yourself, and move on.

SITUATING ALLY SKILLS

Fighting the good fight.

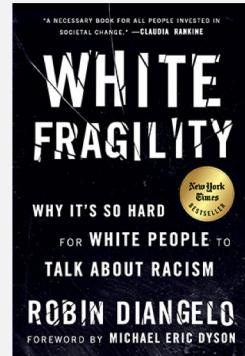


*Practicing ally skills is a thing
you do (sometimes).*

*Ally is not a title that you are
given.*

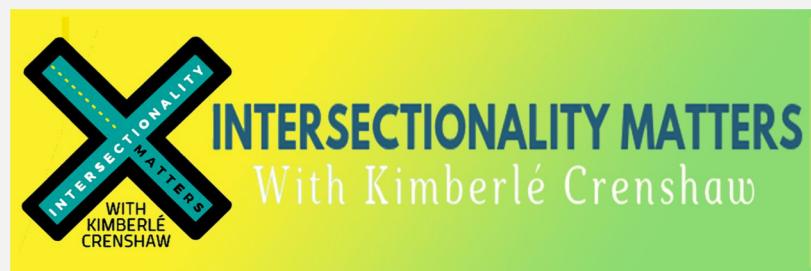
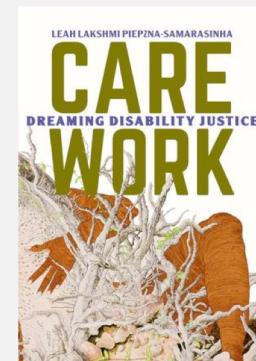
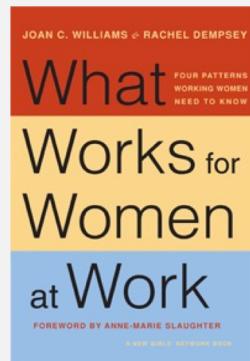
RESOURCES FOR WHITE FOLKS

- Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (2018).
- Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race* (2017).



RESOURCES FOR EVERYONE

- Joan C. Williams, Rachel Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know* (2014).
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018).
- Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, *Intersectionality Matters* podcast/



STYLE GUIDES

- *The Responsible Communication Style Guide* (2017).
- The Recompiler's List of Style Guides, available at:
<https://recompilerstylebook.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/specialized-style-guides.pdf>



GUIDES AND CRITIQUES

- Southern Poverty Law Center, *Speak Up! Responding to Everyday Bigotry*
- Lynn Gehl, *Ally Bill of Responsibilities*
- Mia McKenzie, *The Difference Between Real Solidarity and Ally Theater*
- Indigenous Action Media, *Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex, An Indigenous Perspective*

THANK YOU!

If you have questions, come talk to me after or email me directly
at kendra.serra@gmail.com.