

Ally Skills Workshop

Using Your Societal Advantages for Good

Presented by Kendra Albert

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Who am I?

- Out non-binary person (they/them please!).
- “Day job” as a technology lawyer
- Trans and feminist activist



Agenda for today:

- What is an ally and why ally skills?
- Terminology, discussion guidelines and dos and don'ts
- Ally skills scenarios
- Break
- More scenarios
- Wrap-up and general tips

Help us create a safer space

- You may leave or return at any time, for any reason, without explanation.
- This workshop is not recorded.
- Everyone is here voluntarily.
- Please anonymize when you repeat sensitive stories.
- Share at the level of people you just met at a conference.

What is an ally
and why should
you practice ally
skills?

What is an ally? Some terminology first:

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 fewer privileges

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
- And many more...

What is an ally? Some terminology first:

Target: someone who suffers from oppression (also called "a member of a marginalized group")

Ally: a member of a (privileged) social group that is **working to end oppression** and **understand their own privilege**

Actions



Example

Privilege: The ability to walk into a convenience store and have the owner assume you are there to buy things and not steal them

Oppression: The self-reinforcing system of stories, TV, news coverage, and legal system stereotyping Black people as criminals, that benefits non-Black people and harms Black people

Example

Target: any Black person who wants to enter a convenience store

Ally: a non-Black person who, e.g.,:

- does not shop at stores that they know profile Black people,
- actively objects to racist stories,
- votes in anti-racist ways,
- and reads news articles about this privilege.

Why should allies 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).

Also...

Allies may be in the majority.

Allies may face less blowback.

Allies are often less likely to be put in physical danger.



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Terminology and Discussion Guidelines:

Terminology for gender

Cis: your gender is the same as the gender that was assigned to you at birth

Trans: your gender is different than the gender that was assigned to you at birth

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

Terminology for 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...**

Please don't use:

- **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 - used for animals and plants too, so it is dehumanizing.

Please don't use:

- **Transsexual** - not inclusive of all trans people
- **People with [BODY PART or CHROMOSOME]** instead of "men" or "women"
- **Exception:** members of any marginalized group can agree to call themselves whatever they want (outsiders should not assume they can use the same terms)

Pronoun and transition dos and don'ts:

- **Do:** check in if you're unsure about pronoun use or how to navigate a transition. To be clear, a person's personal wishes override this list or any other advice.
- **Do:** assume retroactivity unless told otherwise.
- **Do:** use current preferred pronouns for famous trans people (like Chelsea Manning).
- **Absolutely don't:** ask about transition logistics or surgery.
- **Absolutely don't:** out the person.*

*Unless they're already publically out or you've been given express permission.

Microaggressions: gender

- Office housework being assigned primarily to women and femme folks
- Telling femme folks and women to smile
- Praising a woman's appearance in a professional context
- Critiquing vocal fry or uptalk (when feedback is not requested)
- Asking trans people about their body parts or assigned at birth sex

Terminology for 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

Terminology for sexuality

Bisexual or pansexual: people attracted to people of any gender (debate on-going)

Asexual: people with little or no sexual attraction 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"

Microaggressions: sexuality

- 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!”

Discussing race and ethnic groups:

- Use the term(s) for each ethnic group or race that the majority of that group prefers that outsiders use.
- Avoid abbreviations, just say or write the full name.
- Don't make generalizations about food, jobs, religion, citizenship, immigration status, languages, hobbies, etc. based on race.
- Distinguish between citizenship and descent.

Commonly used terms for race:

- People of color, white
- Black, Latina/Latino/Latinx, Asian, Asian & Pacific Islander (API), south Asian, east Asian.
- Native Americans for indigenous peoples of mainland U.S.
- First Nations for indigenous peoples of Canada
- Native Hawaiians for indigenous peoples of Hawaii
- Alaskan Natives for indigenous peoples of Alaska

Discussing race:

- Dog whistles: dogs can hear them but people can't
- Don't use "dog whistle" terms to refer to an ethnic group indirectly - e.g., "ethnic" or "urban"
- If uncertain about term to use to refer to a specific ethnic group, ask!



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Microaggressions: race and ethnicity

- Asking "where are you from?"
- Showing off language skills from a specific country after asking where someone is from
- Calling a person of color, specifically Black people, "articulate"
- "I have [race] friends."
- "I don't see color."
- Comments about affirmative action or diversity hires

Terminology for disability

- Use abled person or non-disabled person, disabled person, or person with disabilities.
- 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.
- Don't use euphemisms or judgmental terms: "special needs, "differently able," "mentally challenged," "wheelchair bound," "suffers from...," "victim of..."

Discussing disability

- Don't use names of specific disabilities as metaphors or similes to indicate badness (**deaf, blind, etc.**).
- 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."
- It's generally fine to use figures of speech like "see what I mean" or "I hear you."

Discussing religion, class, age, etc.

- Speak respectfully about religious or spiritual beliefs (but you don't need to be respectful of bigotry or intolerance).
- Do not conflate religion and race. For example, Judaism and Islam are religions, not races.
- Don't use stereotypes about people with lower class jobs (e.g. janitor), adults of particular ages, family role (mother, grandparent, etc.)
- Treat caregivers of all sorts respectfully, including mothers.

What if I make a mistake?

Apologize, correct
yourself, and move on.

Awkward...



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Practice Scenarios

DREADED GROUP CHOOSING TIME

- Form groups of 4 - 6 people.
- Groups that are more diverse have better discussions.
- Introduce yourselves BRIEFLY (1-3 sentences) and include your pronouns.
- At the breaks, please volunteer to change groups.

Preparing for group discussion

- If everyone in the group has the same pronouns, tell the instructor.
- 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.

A few more tips for group discussion

- At the beginning of each scenario, choose someone to report out at the end (this person can change)
- Avoid rules-lawyering: "But what if there was some specific highly unlikely circumstance in which this situation was not actually bad?"
- Focus on how to respond to incidents as an ally in this specific incident, not as the target or in the general case

Basics of ally skills

- Be short, simple, firm.
- Don't try to be funny.
- Play for the audience.
- Practice simple responses.
- Pick your battles.

Most importantly, don't be:

- sexist,
- homophobic,
- transphobic,
- racist,
- ableist,
- classist,
- ageist, and don't make fun of people for being sexually undesirable, unattractive, etc.

Scenario 1: unequal office housework

You notice an older male colleague of yours always asks your younger female colleague to grab coffee for visiting guests, take notes or otherwise do “office housework.” They are at the same level organizationally, although he has been working at your organization for longer.

Things to pay attention to:

- 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: misgendering, deadnames, and emails

In an email thread, you refer to a trans woman colleague using her preferred name and pronouns (she/her/hers, in this case).

Another person replies using her previous name (a.k.a. “dead name”) and he/him/his pronouns to refer to her. She is not on the thread.

Break Time

Scenario 3: an unhappy hour

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.

...what's wrong with jokes about sex?

- Double standard for straight sex and gay sex
- Double standard for sex for men and women
- "Family size" talk can be racism & religious discrimination
- Fertility, pregnancy, adoption can be highly emotional
- Assumes parents are cis and straight

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

Scenario 4: that person on email

On a mailing list that you are required to be on professionally, someone writes “How would you explain this [technical thing] to your girlfriend?”
(using a woman as an example of a technically unsavvy person)

Tip: Charles' Rules of Argument

- Don't go looking for an argument.
- State your position once, speaking to the audience.
- Wait for absurd replies.
- Reply one more time to correct any misunderstandings of your first statement.
- Do not reply again.
- Spend time doing something fun.

Scenario 5: suspicious feedback

You are in the process of reviewing candidates for an executive position. Multiple people who are also a part of the review comment that the black female candidates seem too interested in their own personal gain. No other candidates get similar comments.

understanding sexism as intersectional

“Black women can use a direct, assertive style, but not to act in ambitious, self-promoting, or power-seeking ways. Black women have license to be assertive in achieving the goals of the group—but not in seeking power for themselves.”

Joan C. Williams, Rachel Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know* (2014), at 234.

Wrap Up

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.

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.

This workshop is not a certification.

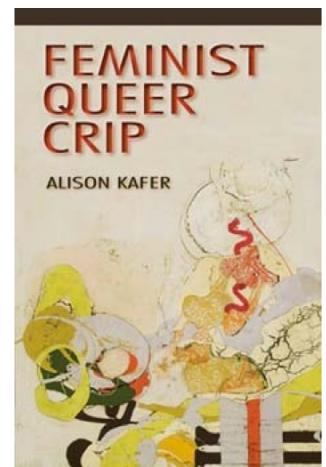
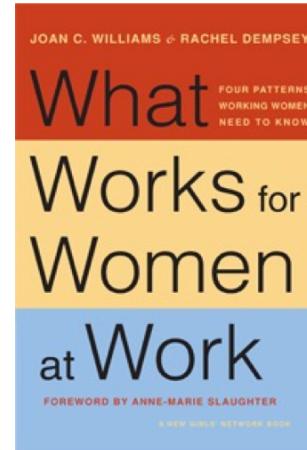
Don't be Kool Aid Man.

Ally is a thing you do (sometimes), not a title that you are given.

We will all continue to make mistakes, what counts is how you react.

Resources – books:

- Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race* (2017).
- Joan C. Williams, Rachel Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know* (2014).
- Allison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013).
- *The Responsible Communication Style Guide* (2017).



Resources – guides and critiques:

- Southern Poverty Law Center, *Speak Up! Responding to Everyday Bigotry*
https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/d6_legacy_files/downloads/publication/splcspeak_up_handbook_0.pdf
- Julie Pagano, *So You Want to Be An Ally*
<http://juliepagano.com/blog/2014/05/10/so-you-want-to-be-an-ally/>
- Mia McKenzie, *The Difference Between Real Solidarity and Ally Theater*
<http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2015/11/the-difference-between-real-solidarity-and-ally-theatre/>
- Indigenous Action Media, *Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex, An Indigenous Perspective*
<http://www.indigenousaction.org/wp-content/uploads/Accomplices-Not-Allies-print.pdf>

Questions and feedback:

Thank you!

If you have questions, I'm happy to take them now.

If you have questions you'd prefer to ask privately, talk to me after or email me directly at:

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