
Ally Skills Workshop

How to use your privilege to reduce inequality, not perpetuate it

Diversity and Inclusion at the Internet Freedom Festival

[CC BY-SA](#) Frame Shift Consulting LLC, Dr. Sheila Addison,
The Ada Initiative

Format of the workshop

30 minute introduction

90 minute group discussion of scenarios

15 minute closing

Disclaimer: This is a workshop based on our expertise and experience living in USA. It may vary from place to place around the world and we are open to learn from you all.

Who am I?

Lead Internet Freedom Festival Facilitator

Member of the Board of Directors of Stumptown Syndicate, non-profit creating positive social change by supporting resilient, inclusive tech communities

Software Engineer at The Coral Project, free software project bringing journalists and the communities they serve closer together.



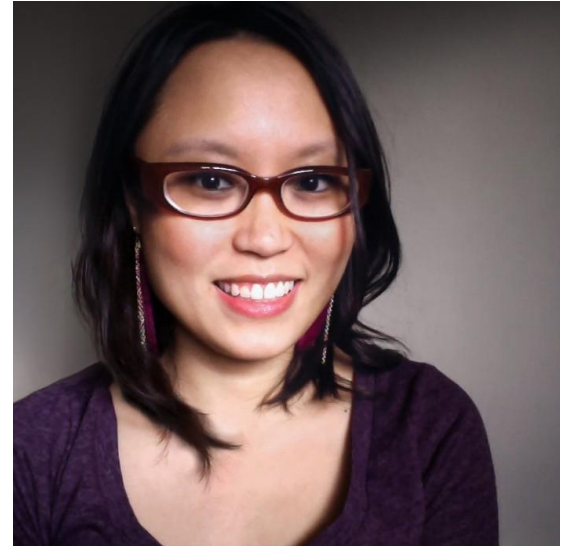
Gabriela
Rodriguez
Berón

Who am I?

IFF Advisory Board Member, Code of Conduct Team

Director of Internet Freedom Projects, Viet Tan

Trainer on digital security, digital activism, movement building.



Trinh Nguyen

Let's talk about technical privilege

We are more likely to listen to people who "are technical"
... but we shouldn't be
"Technical" is more likely to be granted to white men
If you have technical privilege, use it to end technical privilege!



<https://frYERZelic.kr/p/> CC BY @sage_solar

What is an ally? Some terminology first:

Privilege: an unearned advantage given by society to some people and not others

Oppression: systemic, pervasive inequality that is present throughout society, that benefits people with more privilege and harms those with fewer privileges



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 social group that enjoys some privilege that is **working to end oppression** and **understand their own privilege**



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 (anti-black racism)



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

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

Ally: A non-Black person who donates to legal system reform organizations, actively objects to racist stories, votes in anti-racist ways, and reads news articles about this privilege



Can you act as an ally?

Depending on the situation, you may have some unearned societal advantages if you are:

Ethnic majority

Male

Cisgender (more later)

Straight

Not disabled

A documented resident or
citizen

Speak certain language(s)

Specific ages

Certain height/size/shape

Not a mother

Not a caregiver

Educated

Technically experienced

Wealthy

From an upper class family

High caste

Name recognition

And many more...

Why should allies take action more than targets?

"[...] 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, 2016

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>

More reasons allies should act more often

Allies have more power, influence, money, and energy

Allies may be in the majority

Allies can't be accused of jealousy

This workshop teaches you to act as an ally and reduce inequity

This is about social justice and do our part to change



CC BY Nick <https://flic.kr/p/5bt6cp>

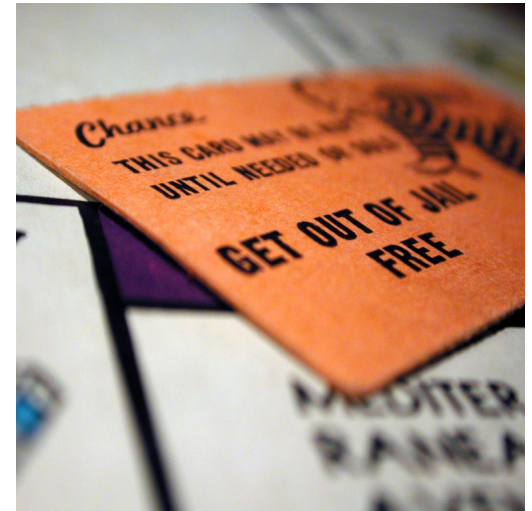
What this workshop is not

A certification, an apology, or a "get-out-of-jail-free card"

Representing anyone's employer or giving legal advice

Time to discuss whether oppression exists, is bad, should be stopped, etc.

<http://geekfeminism.wikia.com>



<https://flic.kr/p/97JC>
CC BY Mark Strozier



Format of the rest of the workshop

Some terminology

Discussion guidelines

Basics of ally skills

Group discussion of real-world scenarios

Wrap-up



What if I make a mistake?

Apologize, correct yourself,
and move on.

Terminology: 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: "male" or "female" doesn't describe your gender accurately

Terminology: gender

Use **they** instead of "he" for third person singular pronoun of unknown gender (used by Austen, Defoe, Byron, Ronald Reagan...)

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**, **yinz**...

Please don't use:

Girls for women 18 years of age and over

Guys for groups that are not all men - people disagree on gender of "guys" so just avoid it

Ladies - associated with "proper" (i.e., subservient) behavior

Females for humans - used for animals and plants too, so it is dehumanizing

There's a Chrome extension by Zoe Quinn



AskReddit

comments

related

other discussions (1)

view images (2)

↑
844

↓

Have you ever wondered something about



FEMALES



in general, but for whatever reason could

never ask a girl what the real answer is?

(self.AskReddit)

submitted 2 years ago* by AsmaClementine



FEMALES



If you do...ask me. I'm bored, one of many reddit
things men wonder about but never ask.

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)

Why no warning about "boys"
or "males"?

Why no warning about "boys"
or "males"?

**We already know not to use "boys"
and it is hard to dehumanize men**

Terminology: sexuality

Straight for women attracted primarily to men or men attracted primarily to women

Gay for men or women attracted primarily to people of the same gender as themselves

Lesbian for women attracted primarily to women

Terminology: sexuality

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

Asexual for people with little or no sexual attraction to people of any gender

Queer is a useful catch-all term for people who don't fit easily into "straight cis woman" or "straight cis man"

Discussion guidelines for 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 or assumptions about food, jobs, religion, citizenship, immigration status, languages, hobbies, etc. based on race
Distinguish between nationality and descent



Some commonly used terms for US

People of color, white, Black, Latina/Latino/Latinx, Asian, Asian & Pacific Islander (API), south Asian, east Asian

Use specific tribe name if possible, otherwise:

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



Discussion guidelines for 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!**



CC BY-SA Turbojet on Wikimedia Commons



Discussion guidelines for disability

Use **abled person**, **disabled person**, or **person with disabilities**

Don't use names of specific disabilities as metaphors or similes to indicate badness (**deaf**, **blind**, etc.)

Don't use at all: **lame**, **dumb**, **stupid**, **crazy**, **retard**, etc

Only use respectfully in cases of self-disclosure: **ADD/ADHD**, **autism spectrum**, **schizophrenic**, **bipolar**...

Discussion guidelines for disability

Instead use "**foolish**," "**thoughtless**," or "**inconsiderate**"
Or a specific adjective like "**crowded**," "**disorganized**,"
or "**annoying**"

It's fine to use figures of speech like "see what I mean" or
"I hear you"



CC BY Snowqueen1426
<https://flic.kr/p/cm716Y>

Discussion guidelines for body size

Use neutral descriptions: “**higher weight**,” “**lower weight**,” “**larger body**,” “**smaller build**,” “**medium size**”

Don’t use terms that equate size with health or medicalize body size: “**healthy weight**,” “**obese**,” “**struggles with his weight**”

Don’t use terms implying a desirable weight: e.g. “**normal weight**,” “**overweight**,” “**too skinny**”

Discussion guidelines for religion, class, age, etc.

Speak respectfully about religious or spiritual beliefs (but you don't need to be respectful of bigotry or intolerance)

Don't use stereotypes about people with working class jobs (e.g. janitor), members of a caste, adults of particular ages, family role (mother, grandparent, etc.)

Treat caregivers of all sorts respectfully, including mothers

Paradox of Tolerance

“The **paradox of tolerance** arises when a [tolerant](#) person holds antagonistic views towards *intolerance*, and hence is intolerant of it. The tolerant individual would then be by definition intolerant of intolerance. In other words, refusing to tolerate intolerance is itself intolerance.” (wikipedia)



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

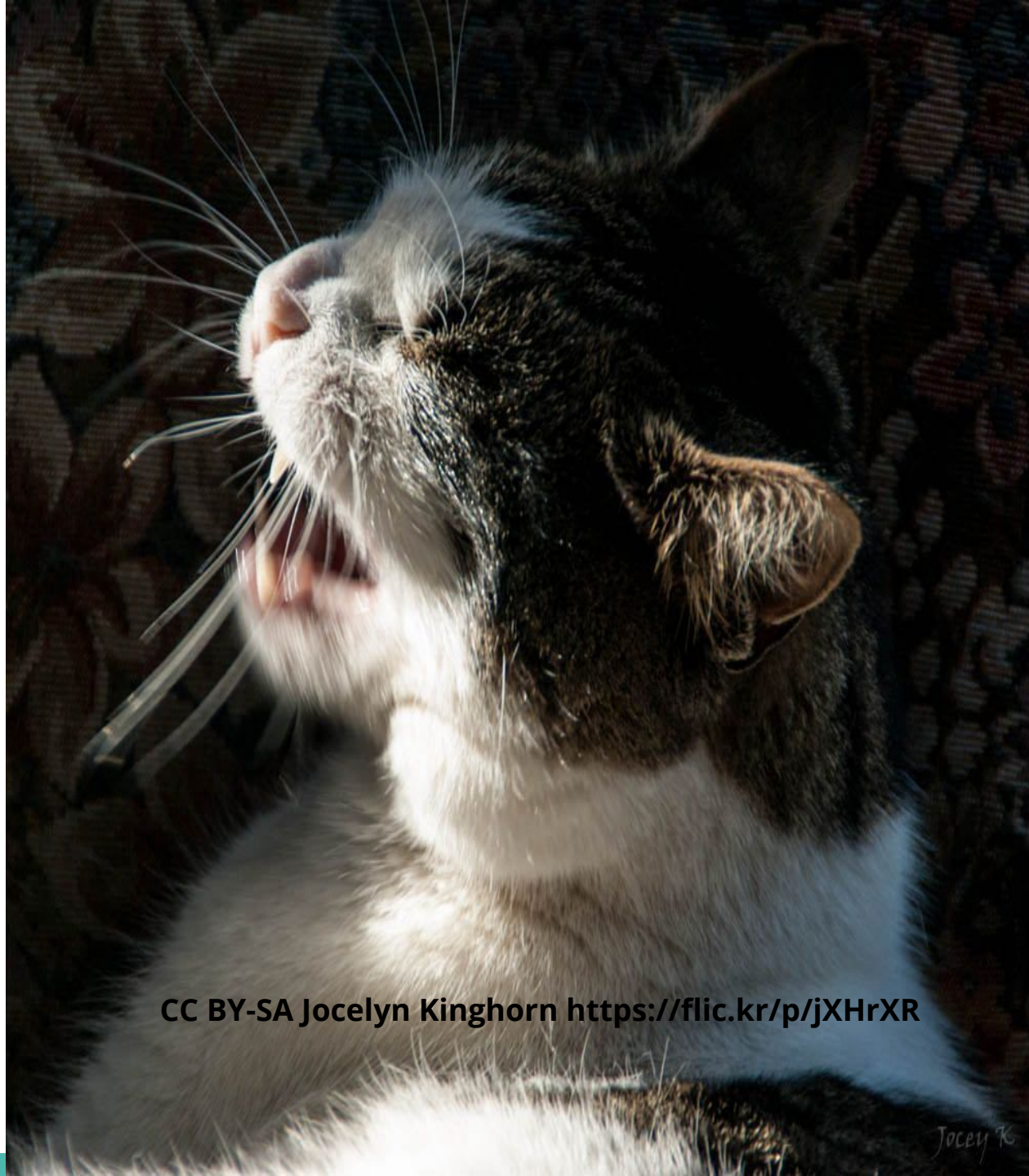
Awkward...



CC BY Andrew Kuznetzov <https://flic.kr/p/4c8Sax>



CC BY John of Wales <https://flic.kr/p/HaeRd>



CC BY-SA Jocelyn Kinghorn <https://flic.kr/p/jXHrXR>

Jocelyn K.

Basics of ally skills

- Be short, simple, firm
- Don't focus on trying to be funny
- Think about the audience
- Practice simple responses
- Pick your battles



CC BY-SA John Lilley <https://flic.kr/p/aj1B2b>

While you're trying to help one group, don't be:

sexist
homophobic
transphobic
racist
ableist
classist
ageist
body-shaming
and don't describe people as sexually undesirable



CC BY-SA Alan Levine <https://flic.kr/p/9dgohA>

DREADED GROUP CHOOSING TIME :D

Form groups of 4 - 6 people

Groups that are more diverse have better discussions

Changing groups at breaks is encouraged

Say your name and your pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs)

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



Preparing for group discussion

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

Feel free to gate-keep the gatekeeper

At the beginning of a scenario, choose someone to report-out



CC BY TANAKA Juuyoh (田中十洋)
<https://flic.kr/p/bVnHL6>



A few more tips for group discussion

Avoid rules-lawyering: "But what if there was some specific highly unlikely circumstance in which this situation was not actually bad?"

If you're not sure of the situation, pick one (or more) interpretations and discuss it

Focus on **how to respond to incidents as an ally** in this specific incident, not as the target or in the general case



A woman you don't know is standing near your group at a conference or similar event in a male-dominated field. She is wearing a head scarf that looks like a Muslim hijab to you. She is alone and looks like she would rather be talking to people.

(similar: any member of a visible, underrepresented, marginalized group)

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?

At a meeting, a person with visual impairment makes a suggestion, but no one picks up on it. Later on in the meeting, a sighted person makes the same suggestion and is given credit for it.
(similar: any person known to be a member of a marginalized group)



Effective and just meetings

Good meetings have the following roles:

- Facilitator
- Timekeeper
- Notetaker
- Gatekeeper

For Internet Freedom Festival you can find them in the [wiki](#)



On a technical mailing list, someone writes “How would you explain this [technical thing] to your grandmother?”
(also: girlfriend, mother, aunt, wife, occasionally grandfather)

Tip: Charles' Rules of Argument

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

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Charles%27_Rules_of_Argument

A person of color in your community points out on social media that a conference in your community has all white speakers. Several other people criticize them for being too abrasive, aggressive, loud, out of line, etc.



Tone policing/The "tone argument"

When people speak up in support of oppressed groups, it makes people in the dominant group feel guilty and sad

A common response is to ask the people speaking up to not hurt the feelings of the dominant group
Often this uses the word "angry" and especially "tone"

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone_argument

At a conference after-party, a male participant makes a joke about how much sex another male participant must have had in order to have so many children. Everyone is holding an alcoholic drink.

Why talking about sex at professional conference space is harmful

Double standard for straight sex and gay sex

"Family size" talk can be racism & religious discrimination

Some racist stereotypes are about sex or genitals

Fertility, pregnancy, adoption can be highly emotional

Why talking about sex at a professional conference space is harmful, cont'd

Strong pressure to "be cool" about sex

Assumes parents are cis and straight

Double standard for sex for men and women

Sex talk => objectification & harassment of women

**Take-away: Save talking about sex for outside
of work**

Myths about alcohol and bad behavior

The immediate physiological effects of alcohol are:

- Loss of coordination

- Sleepiness

- Difficulty multi-tasking

Everything else (violence, sexual advances, rude comments) is voluntary and under conscious control:

<http://www.sirc.org/publik/drinking4.html>

How to counter cultural messages about alcohol

Don't serve alcohol at all (surprisingly popular!)

Serve high quality non-alcoholic beverages

Serve at same stations with same prominence

More tips on serving alcohol in an inclusive manner, by Kara Sowles:

<https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/alcohol-and-inclusivity-planning-tech-events-with-non-alcoholic-options>

Advanced ally skills

Don't expect praise and credit for fighting inequality

Follow and support leaders from target groups

Assume targets are knowledgeable about their oppression

Follow your discomfort: if something makes you feel bad, find out more and understand why before reacting

When you make a mistake, apologize, correct yourself, and move on

Ally Skills Workshop

<http://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop>

Internet Freedom Festival

Alternate scenarios

You are eating lunch in the cafeteria when a group sits down near you. One person comments loudly “If I ate that, I’d be as big as a house!” A higher-weight coworker is sitting nearby and can clearly overhear.

The effects of weight discrimination at work

“Fat talk/diet talk” is seen as bonding but creates a hostile environment for other employees

Higher weight people face workplace discrimination, particularly women, regardless of ability to do the job

Body size is falsely equated with virtue: self-control, hard worker, good health

Workplace “health initiatives” are often discriminatory

In all of the sessions you've gone, the only woman takes the notes for the fourth time in a row. When you comment on this to her, she smiles wryly and says, "Guess who picks up dirty cups after parties and organizes birthday cards too?"

You're watching two colleagues play ping pong. One is black and one is white. When your black coworker scores, he makes a celebratory gesture. Your white coworker tells him to stop making gang signs.



A straight colleague and a queer colleague are both getting married soon and are talking about their honeymoon plans. Shortly afterwards, another coworker complains privately to you, saying your queer coworker shouldn't talk about sex so often because she doesn't want to think about them having sex with their same-gender partner.

You are one of the interviewers for a person applying to a software engineer position. You notice that their resume says they graduated from university 20 years before anyone else on the team. In the hiring discussion, a coworker says, "Can someone that old keep up with the rest of us?"

At a happy hour, a younger colleague pulls you aside and starts to cry, explaining that another one of your coworkers repeatedly tried to reach under her skirt. The happy hour is not sponsored or organized by your company.

Looking over applicants, there are two final candidates for a technical position. Both are self-taught coders/developers, one is a woman/trans/minority (tbd), the other is a man. [many support the man, and argue that the woman doesn't have a CS degree]

Funders deciding between “grassroots” non-tool proposal and a tool proposal

Your company has a chat channel for random discussion. One person is talking about food they are eating. Another person says, "If I ate that, I'd be as big as a house!" Another person joins in with, "Don't remind me, I've fallen off my diet again."

You're watching two colleagues play ping pong. One is black and one is white. When your black coworker scores, he makes a celebratory gesture. Your white coworker tells him to stop making gang signs.

Tip: Speak for yourself, not others

You can speak up against oppression against a group you aren't part of, without claiming you are doing it on behalf of another person who is part of the group.

Right: "Don't do that because I think it is wrong."

Wrong: "Don't do that in front of Joe!" "That's very offensive for [people in group]." "I'm sure that hurt Jane."

A Latina co-worker wears a colorful dress to your annual all-hands meeting. When she's not around, several male co-workers start commenting on her clothes and makeup, and rating her attractiveness compared to other women co-workers.

At a work-related party, a co-worker who has had a few drinks pulls you aside and drunkenly complains about how unreasonable it is to expect everyone to use new names and pronouns for a co-worker who has just come out as trans.

Example

Privilege: The ability to interview for a job and have the interviewer assume that if you have children, you will continue doing a good job at work

Oppression: Family members' expectations that women take on most of the childcare, fathers using paternity leave for things other than childcare, belief that mothers don't want to return to full-time paid work

Example

Target: Any woman who wants to work for pay for an employer

Ally: A man who takes on significant childcare responsibilities, donates to women's causes, uses paternity leave for childcare, speaks up at work against stereotypes about mothers, and reads news articles about privileges fathers enjoy and mothers don't

Let's talk about "political correctness"

This is a dismissive, hurtful, rude term invented by racist, sexist, homophobic people who are part of the right-wing political establishment in the United States

Also beloved by some angry white male professors, famous comedians, well-published pundits...

Don't use this term unless you are putting it in "air quotes"

A male coworker often insists on helping women more than men: opening doors, taking boxes they are carrying away from them, giving advice on their personal lives. When asked, he says it is because he respects women and views them as the source of human life.

"Benevolent sexism" is also harmful

Belief that women need to be protected implies that women are weaker, childlike, and subservient

Belief that women are ethically better or more socially skilled implies that men are expected to and can be excused for doing wrong or being rude

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambivalent_sexism

On a mailing list in your community, someone uses the term "asylum shopping" to refer to refugees fleeing conflict in Syria.

How to get the workshop

Pay for someone to teach it
Attend a public workshop
Attend a train-the-trainers
Please fill out the workshop survey

Thanks to Valerie Aurora for the training and materials!
<https://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop/>



Credit: David Balliol, Thomas Bresson