Ally Skills Workshop Facilitator's Guide

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Introduction

This is a guide for facilitators teaching the Ally Skills Workshop, which is focused on teaching men small, simple, everyday actions to support women in their workplaces and communities. This guide and the Ally Skills Workshop are designed and created by the [Ada Initiative](#) and the contributors of the [Geek Feminism Wiki](#), and are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike 3.0 license.

About the Ally Skills Workshop

Often, when a sexist incident happens, we are so busy being shocked and amazed that we can't quickly react. Other times we have plenty of time to react but can't figure out what to do, or we do something but it turns out to be more harmful than helpful. This is true even for people who have a lot of experience and education in supporting women in their communities.

The solution is education and practice. By discussing theoretical scenarios and coming up with answers in a friendly environment, we have a better chance at responding in the real world. In the Ally Skills workshop, a facilitator leads participants in discussions about creating a friendly environment for women, responding to casual sexism, opposing advocacy of sexism, reacting to harassment of women, influencing organizations, and continuing their education after the class.

Scope and audience

The Ally Skills workshop is focused on teaching men how to support women in their daily lives by taking small, simple, everyday actions. It is designed for an audience of people voluntarily attending the workshop, and who already agree that sexism exists, that it should stop, and

3

that they personally would like to help end it. An "ally" in this context is someone who wants to help a disadvantaged group, but is not a member of that group themselves. We prefer the term "ally skills" instead of "allies" because it emphasizes that actions are what make a difference, not self-identification as a supporter by itself.

Women often also attend the workshop, both to learn techniques and to contribute their knowledge to the discussion. The most successful workshops are 20-40% women because of the first-person perspective women can bring to the discussions. The scope of the workshop does not include teaching women how to respond to sexism.

Preparing for the workshop

The workshop only works if the right preparation has been done in advance: collecting attendees, setting up the room, printing materials, etc. Everything included in this section is important for the success of the workshop, so please don't skip any of it!

Collect sign-ups in advance

In most cases, you will want to register people in advance for the workshop for several reasons: to get the right number of people for a successful workshop, so that you can screen unhelpful people out in advance, and so you can get the right gender balance. You should ask for the following information:

- Preferred name
- Email address
- URL where we can learn more about you (optional)
- Briefly, what are your thoughts on women in [FIELD]? (or other screening question)
- How would you describe your gender? (optional, free-form text field)

We have found that Google Forms tend to lose form entries (we don't know why), and that EventBrite makes it hard to review the answers. We are investigating Submittable as a method of taking applications.

Workshop size

The ideal workshop size is between 20 and 30 people, but the workshop can be run with lower quality with up to 50 people and as few as 5 people. With fewer than 20 people, not as many different ideas get explored during the discussion period in which participants split into groups of 4 to 6 people. With more people, the time to report out from each group becomes longer and limits the number of scenarios that can be discussed. If you have more than 30 people in a workshop, you will need to ask only a subset of the groups to report-out for each scenario (we recommend 5 to 6 at most).

Participation must be voluntary and in good faith

The workshop is only as good as the people who attend it. The workshop only works when people attend it voluntarily, without external coercion such as an organizational mandate for

everyone to take the workshop. They must also be attending in good faith: they already agree that sexism exists, that it should stop, and that they personally would like to help end it. The workshop is not helped by the presence of people skeptical of the basic goals or people "playing devil's advocate." If an attendee acts this way, it is your responsibility, as workshop leader, to ask that person to leave. Often, you can call a break suddenly and ask them to leave privately during the break.

Avoiding large power differences between attendees

Creating an environment where people feel safe making mistakes and asking honest questions often means avoiding large power differences between attendees. For example, an individual contributor is probably not going to speak up as much if they are in the same group as the CEO of the company. A good rule of thumb is that individual contributors, line managers, and managers of line managers can attend, but no one above that level.

Enforcing the rules on attendees

To make sure these rules (voluntary, in good faith, no managers above a certain level) are followed, have discussions with anyone in a position to mandate attendance at the workshop about these rules. Write your advertising material to include these rules and to appeal to people who already believe that sexism is a problem, etc. Example: "Do you think diversity in [FIELD] is important? Would you like to be part of changing the culture of [FIELD] to be more welcoming to women, newcomers, and people in marginalized groups? You can help by attending the Ally Skills Workshop."

Gender distribution of participants

The ideal workshop gender distribution is 20-40% women, so that each discussion group has at least one woman and ideally two woman. Getting this distribution requires different techniques in different organizations. In some organizations, women will sign up for the workshop at the same rate as men, even if it is advertised to men. In these organizations, recruiting for the workshop should focus on encouraging men to attend in order to get about 20-40% women. In other organizations, women will need to be encouraged to sign up directly. We suggest using a registration system that asks people to describe their gender in a free-form text field (do NOT use a drop-down menu), checking the gender distribution of the attendees regularly, and changing your advertising strategy based on the proportions registered.

Schedule and length

The ideal workshop time is 3 hours, with two 15 minute breaks at the hour marks. We recommend serving drinks and snacks during the break. Allowing a half hour of post-workshop discussion time is often appreciated by participants. It is possible to make the workshop shorter, but the universal feedback from workshop participants was that 2 hours was not long enough. Only one person has complained that the 3 hour workshop was not long enough.

Customizing the slides

Edit the [workshop slides template](#) in advance to customize it for you and your audience. If you feel confident changing scenarios on the fly, ask the workshop participants what scenarios and situations they would like to discuss, and reorder the slides to place them first in the scenario section.

Physical setup

The seating arrangement for the workshop is ideally round tables that seat 4-6 people with the appropriate number of chairs, arranged so that everyone can hear the presenter speaking and see the slides. In most rooms and for most people, you will not need any microphone or sound system. You will definitely need a projector.

Supplies

Things to bring to the workshop:
- Clicker and video input/output converter
- Stopwatch or timer to time the scenario discussions
- Bell or other noisemaker to signal the end of scenario discussions
- Printouts of the Ally Skills Workshop handout for all participants
- Pens (for notes) and felt-tip markers (for name tags)
- Name tags, [with "Preferred pronouns:" printed on them](#) if possible

Do not record or broadcast the workshop

We do not recommend recording a workshop or broadcasting it online in any way. Recording will make people afraid to answer or discuss, and participants' comments may be taken out of context. If you do decide to record the workshop, some workarounds are to not record the participants, edit out the participants' answers, only record the instructor and have the instructor repeat any participants input in order to anonymize it, or allow each participant to review and request edits of the video before it is released.

Getting feedback

After the workshop, you may want to survey the participants (see this [example survey](#)) to understand the impact of the workshop as well as to gather any feedback from participants about the workshop style and content that they may be uncomfortable sharing in public.

Teaching the introduction

The workshop begins with a 20 minute introduction covering the basic principles of responding to sexism effectively.

Before the workshop starts

Distribute the workshop handouts and pens at the tables. As people enter the room, ask them to fill out a name tag and include their preferred pronouns, then choose a table. For public workshops, you will want someone to screen people as they enter and make sure they signed up in advance. If you feel up to it, you can screen people who didn't sign up in advance by asking them what brought them to the workshop and listening to their answers.

Introduce yourself

Start by introducing yourself and and the workshop. Be sure that your presentation includes attribution or credit to the Ada Initiative according to the terms of the CC BY-SA 3.0 license (a footer or note on the title and closing slide will do nicely).

If for some reason people are arriving late to the workshop, stop here and ask the participants for volunteers to share why they came to the workshop. This is also good to do simply to get more information to tailor the workshop to the attendees' interests and to get people involved interactively from the start, but it will shorten the time for scenarios.

Explain the format and schedule

Explain the format and schedule of the workshop: how long it will be, when breaks will be, whether each section will be lecture or discussion. When announcing breaks, always tell people that the break will be 5 minutes shorter than you intend. So if the schedule says breaks are 10 minutes long, in reality they are 15 minutes long. Generally, each scenario takes about 15 minutes to discuss, so a 3 hour workshop works out to about 8-9 scenarios.

Here is an example format for a 3 hour workshop:
- 20 minute introduction
- 50 minutes discussion of scenarios
- 10 minute break (really 15 minutes)
- 50 minutes discussion of scenarios
- 10 minute break (really 15 minutes)
- 50 minutes discussion of scenarios
- 10 minute wrap-up

Explain gender-related vocabulary in the workshop

The workshop is designed to teach men how to support women, but people come in more than these two genders. It is important to clarify in the beginning what you mean by "men" and "women" and that you are aware there are other genders, and teach people what terminology to use during the workshop to avoid being cissexist (see the [Geek Feminism wiki page on cissexism](#) for more information).

Start by defining the terms "cis," "trans," and "genderqueer." "Cis" means someone's gender is male or female, and they have the same gender that they were assigned at birth. "Trans" means their gender is male or female, and different from that assigned at birth. "Genderqueer" means neither male nor female accurately describe their gender. "Women" includes both cis women and trans women, and likewise for "men." "Genderqueer folks" is one common term that encompasses people who don't identify as simply male or female.

Remind people that:
- Not all women have uteruses, ovaries, or XX chromosomes (and some men do)
- Not all men have penises, testicles, or XY chromosomes (and some women do)

- "Females" is often dehumanizing because it is used for non-human creatures
- Don't use "girls" for women 18 and up - it is belittling.
- Just say "men," "women," and "genderqueer folks"

Some detail for workshop teachers (but you do not have to go into this level of detail for the attendees): [Gender binary] language divides people into "men" and "women" and traits or qualities into "masculine" and "feminine," with no other options. Many people do not identify as either wholly "male" or wholly "female." This means, for example, that using phrases like "men and women" to mean "all adult people regardless of gender" is inaccurate and incorrect (try "people of all genders" instead). Also be aware that "men" is not equivalent to "not women" or vice versa.

Explain the focus on ally skills for men

In the Ally Skills workshop, the primary audience is cis men - people who have received from birth the societal advantages men are more likely to get than women - who want to learn to support women. Trans men are a secondary audience, who currently have many of the societal advantages given to cis men but did not necessarily grow up with them.

This part of the workshop is intended to reduce self-doubt and increase the likelihood of men taking action after the workshop. It also introduces the concept of male privilege (without using those specific words).

Read the quote from the slide about the study showing that men are have fewer penalties for diversity-valuing behavior than women, and similarly for white people compared to people of color. Explain that this is in part because men or white people are seen as altruistic because they are advocating for others, but also because they have greater freedom in most cultures to be challenging, confrontational, etc.

Many workplaces and communities where the Ally Skills workshop is being taught will be majority male. Another argument you can use in this case is that if we rely on women to change the culture to be more friendly to women, we are losing the majority of people who might help with this change. Women are also already at a disadvantage for many other reasons (the second shift, discrimination, not fitting in, lacking role models) and adding the burden of social justice advocacy will likely increase the chance of women dropping out. If you have statistics on the proportion of men and women in your community, you can add a slide here.

Men have many advantages given to them by society simply for being male: men are presumed to know what they are talking about, people are more likely to listen and give credit to men, people feel more comfortable being told what to do by men. Men who are worried about being attacked for advocating for women shouldn't predict the response based on how they see people react to women. Men will still face criticism for speaking up, but are also more

likely to be praised, thanked, and respected than women, and are far less likely to be harassed or threatened.

Set scope of workshop

The workshop is intended only for people who already believe sexism is a problem and want to act personally to help stop it. Answering questions or discussing whether sexism exists will take too much class time. Provide starting places for people who do have these questions to learn more, like the Geek Feminism Wiki. If someone does start bringing up these questions during the class, remind them of the scope. If they continue after one or two reminders, call a break and ask them to leave the class. It is your responsibility and no one else's to ask this person to leave. If you don't, you are wasting 3 hours of at least 3-5 other people's time, as well as some of that of everyone in the workshop.

Depending on your position, the topics of legal advice and HR rules may be off-topic for the workshop. If you are teaching the workshop at a company, you may be interpreted as representing HR even when you are not. If people ask questions about HR policy, or about when to report things to HR, we recommend not answering the question. This is particularly difficult when a discussion group comes with a solution involving reporting the situation to HR, when in many cases that will result in retaliation for the target of the harassment, up to and including losing their job. However, you can't say outright "don't report to HR" when that is in violation of the company's HR rules. This disclaimer helps avoid in-class confrontations.

Similarly, whether or not you are a lawyer, it is unlikely that you want to offer legal advice in this workshop. The situations described in the scenarios are designed to be not obviously illegal in and of themselves in the United States (though they could be illegal if they were part of a pervasive, severe pattern of harassment).

Not a certification

Occasionally people attend the workshop in hopes of using it to "prove" they weren't sexist in the past, or as a defense against accusations of sexism in the future. Explain that the workshop doesn't work that way, but what it will do is teach people how to respond well when they make mistakes in the future.

Emphasize rules for a safer space

Workshops should be safe spaces where participants are allowed to make mistakes and possibly do or say sexist things, or ask foolish questions. You should tell everyone that the workshop is intended to be a safer space for learning and is not being recorded (check that any cameras in the room are actually off - often conferences automatically record all sessions, and many conference rooms have video cameras installed). Ask people not to make fun of people's well-intentioned comments or repeat unflattering stories outside the workshop. Assure people that everyone is here voluntarily because they care about supporting women, and that the organizers have done some level of screening. For public workshops, suggest that they only share things that they would share at dinner with people they had met that day at a conference.

Describe the format of the rest of the workshop

Explain that the rest of the workshop will be in the form of:

- Facilitator explains the basic principles of responding to sexism
- Participants form discussion groups of 4-6 people
- Facilitator presents an example scenario
- Participants discuss in small groups for 3-5 minutes
- Each group reports out major conclusions and questions
- Repeat until time is up (with breaks)

We recommend taking requests for specific scenarios during the breaks or after the participants have done at least two "easy" scenarios.

Break the tension

Often there's a lot of tension that can result in giggling at inappropriate times because people are nervous about talking about sex(ism). We suggest acknowledging the awkwardness explicitly and showing a funny slide or making a joke and giving people a chance to giggle before they get into serious discussion. Be extremely careful about your choice of tension-breaking humor and review it thoroughly if you change it from the default. The choice of sneezing cats in the example slides is deliberate: few people are disturbed or alienated by pictures of cats. (Also, these particular pictures are CC BY-SA licensed.)

Review basic principles of responding to sexism

This section covers helpful ground rules for responding to sexism.

- Be short, simple, and firm. Often people fall into the trap of believing their responses must be complex, well-reasoned, and beautifully composed to be effective, and end up doing nothing at all because it is too much work to put together a response. Once you take that pressure off, many people are willing to say things as simple as "We don't do that here" - which is far better than saying nothing at all.
- Humor usually backfires, avoid it. It is possible to respond to sexism with a joke that isn't itself sexist, homophobic, racist, classist, etc., but it's really hard. Most of the time, participants should leave humor for the experts.
- Pick your battles. Sexism is pervasive enough that no one can respond to every sexist incident they see or they'd never get anything else done. Telling participants that they can choose when to respond to sexism (e.g., not on days when they have a migraine or an important presentation) allows them to act when they are able without feeling like a hypocrite for the times they don't act.
- Play for the audience. The person doing the sexist thing is the person least likely to change their mind, so encourage participants to concentrate on changing the minds of the people listening, if any. The exception to this rule is when the person doing the sexist thing is doing so without full awareness of the effect, and/or the person responding has a positive personal relationship with the person doing the sexist thing.

10

- Practice your responses. Tell them that comedians practice their lines and they are allowed to as well. It's also okay to choke the first few times they run into a situation; just keeping practicing. A useful technique is to pick a few short responses that feel good to you and practice saying them until they come automatically. Some options:
  - "We don't do that around here."
  - "Not cool, dude."
  - "AWWWWWWWKWARD."
- Don't fight sexism with other ism's. Don't try to fight sexism by saying something homophobic, transphobic, racist, classist, etc. - for example, responding to a situation involving cis female booth babes by asking how people would feel about male homesexual booth babes. In this example, people are invoking homophobia to attempt to evoke empathy with people feeling sexually objectified, which helps no one. Less obvious is that you should avoid making fun of people who are less sexually attractive or desirable. It may feel good to make fun of someone by saying he won't get a date because he's sexist, but it will not feel good to someone listening who can't get a date for some reason other than their voluntarily chosen horrible opinions.

Forming groups

Now you want the participants to form small groups of 4-6 people, with as much diversity within each group as possible. Forming a group in a training class is almost universally dreaded, so be understanding if this takes some time and you need to help people choose groups. Encourage people by reminding them that everyone is there because they want to support women, so they are probably pretty nice people. If you have set up the room in small tables with seating for 4-6 people at each, you are probably most of the way there. Ask groups of 3 or smaller to join another group. Remind them that they will be encouraged to change groups at the breaks.

Once the groups are formed, ask each group group to introduce themselves to each other with ONE SENTENCE - emphasize this because otherwise people tend to go on for several minutes about themselves, and you only want to spend 3 minutes on this section. Ask them to choose a gatekeeper when they are done with introductions. Explain that a gatekeeper pays attention to who isn't getting a chance to speak and asks them to speak, and interrupts people who are talking too much. Then ask them to notify the instructor if the people in their group all have the same pronouns.

After a few minutes, starting walking around the groups asking for the gatekeeper to raise their hand (don't just ask if they have one, get someone to physically acknowledge it). Then ask if they have all the same pronouns. After you have asked all the groups, if you have any same-pronoun groups, ask if any group has more than one person with non-male pronouns (presuming the same-pronoun group is all male) and if they would be willing to trade one of those people with the same-pronoun groups. If there aren't enough people of each gender to do this, it is okay, you are just trying avoid a situation where, e.g., 4 women sit in the same

group and 3 groups have no women at all. The ideal situation is two women in each group, but it is not always attainable.

Now ask them choose someone to report out at the end of each scenario with the ideas and questions from your group (this person can and should vary throughout the scenarios). Tell them to avoid rules-lawyering; specifically ask them to not spend too much time focusing on whether a scenario was actually sexist or not. It's okay to spend some time talking about how to tell when something is sexist, but the focus of discussion should not be on how in some incredibly unlikely situation the scenario isn't sexist. There are no trick questions in the workshop. The focus of the discussion should be on what men can do in that situation to help (and specifically not what women can do).

Tips for scenario discussion

Now you are ready to discuss scenarios: examples of situations in which men can take action to support women. Plan for about 12 - 15 minutes total time for each scenario.

The scenarios should start with easier, lower-stakes situations and progress to more difficult situations to let the participants get comfortable with each other and the format. Feel free to create your own scenarios or discuss ones suggested by the participants. It is important that they are based on real-world examples - discussing hypotheticals is often a waste of time. All of the example scenarios we provide are directly based on events that have actually happened. None are exaggerated or unusually rare. See the Timeline of Incidents for more ideas for real-life examples.

For each scenario, read the scenario aloud and tell the groups they have 3 minutes (somewhere between 3 and 5 minutes is recommended) to talk amongst themselves about the scenario, propose various responses, and come up with questions to ask. Try to listen to the discussion in the groups and try not to interrupt people when they are in the midst of an important conversation, but you will have to stop the discussion while people are still talking excitedly in every case. Give people 30 seconds warning before the discussion ends by saying, "30 seconds!" loudly. A bell can be useful to signal the end of the discussion. It will get harder to stop discussion as the workshop goes on.

Once everyone has quieted down, ask each group to have their representative to list their major discussion points, suggestions, insights, and questions. Use a different order each time so that every group gets a chance to list the most common insights first. At the end of each report-out, briefly recap any points you'd like to emphasize, point out any problems in their suggestions (like places where they are being unintentionally transphobic), and answer any questions they have. However, try to resist making any points that weren't directly suggested or requested until all the groups have reported out, so participants get the reward of coming up with answers on their own. Make sure you hit all the points listed in each scenario - printing out the list and marking them off might help.

In between scenarios is a good time to present tips relevant to the previous scenario, draw people's attention to how they are conducting discussion, etc. Alternating between group discussion, group report-out, and very short lectures or stories is a good way to keep people engaged. Don't forget to take breaks; usually participants don't notice the time flying by and may not remind you to take a break if you forget.

Scenario types

Creating a friendly environment for women

An important step to countering sexism is to create a welcoming environment for women who are attending geek events or joining geek forums. These scenarios are about small things you can do to make women feel more comfortable.

Responding to casual sexism

Casual sexism is when people do or say sexist things but aren't even aware that they are sexist. These scenarios are about how to respond to people who want to support women in geek culture, but don't realize they just did something harmful. (Of course, someone can do something casually sexist and also not care about supporting women!)

Speaking up against advocacy of sexism

Sometimes people directly advocate for sexist behavior. They may or may not argue that their position is not, in fact sexist (see this article on [protecting daughters](#) for an example of literal paternalism), but they do not actually want to support women. In this case, it's best to play to the audience.

Intervening in harassment of women

A great deal of harassment of women happens in private or out of sight of potential allies. When it does happen in front of other people, it presents a rare opportunity to intervene. These scenarios are about how to intervene when you are lucky enough to witness harassment.

Not supporting sexist organizations

Sometimes an entire organization does something sexist. It may seem hopeless to try to change a large organization, but often it only takes one person speaking up to help other people speak up as well. Many organizations require the participation, labor, or money that individuals control.

Educating yourself

The workshop is a good start on learning about ally skills. Scenarios of this type are about learning skills for continuing that education.

Scenarios, tips, and discussion guide

This section is arranged so that the scenarios and tips from the example slides come first, in the order they are in the slides, followed by scenarios not included in the example presentation.

Scenario: A woman is standing near your group at an event

A woman you don't know is standing near your group at a conference or similar event in your field. She is alone and looks like she would rather be talking to people.

Ideal response:
- Walk up and stand a little farther away from what you think is the usual distance, and say, "Hello, my name is $NAME. What brings you to this event?" If she responds positively, say, "My friends and I were discussing $TOPIC, would you care to join us?"
- If you are physically intimidating, consider asking someone else to do this.

Bad responses:
- "What do you do?" or "Where do you work?" Women are often challenged on their credentials at conferences or events, and this can be mistaken for questioning her right to be there or trying to suss out her relative status.
- Asking for her name, location, marital or family status.
- Telling her personal information like your own marital status, location, etc.
- Continuing a two-person conversation for more than a few minutes before offering to introduce her to the group.

Points to cover:
- As soon as someone mentions that they don't want to appear to be hitting on the woman, thank them and explain that the problem here is that we assume men are heterosexual and likely to be making a sexual advance if they speak to a woman. The ways to counter this are to stand a little farther away than usual, don't ask her name, ask a very neutral impersonal question, and quickly invite her to join a larger group rather than continue talking one-on-one.

Tip: Pay attention to patterns of discussion related to gender

The next slide asks people to be aware of whether people are having difficulty being heard or dominating the conversation, and whether there are patterns related to gender. It is important to raise this awareness early for two reasons: First, some women may already be frustrated by being interrupted or talked over in the first 3 minutes of a workshop designed to stop sexism. Second, you want to stop this behavior very early in the workshop or else participants won't get the full benefit.

Scenario: Women's contributions to meetings are ignored or co-opted

At a meeting, a woman makes a suggestion but no one picks up on it. Later, a man makes the same suggestion and is given credit for it.

Presentation tip: Ask for a show of hands of everyone who has seen this happen.

Ideal responses:

- "I'm glad you picked up on [woman's name]'s idea! [Woman's name], could you expand on that?"
- Start an organization-wide initiative to encourage formally using meeting roles like [gatekeepers and note-takers](). Gatekeepers make sure people get to speak who might otherwise not, and note-takers document who said what first.
- For anything more confrontational, first ask for the target's consent. Then agree on whether you might say something more confrontational, speak to the person's manager after the meeting, or something else.

Bad:
- Start a confrontation without the target's consent.

Points to cover:
- It is crucial to explicitly call out the concept of consent of the target when attempting to help in ways that could result in retaliation on the target. The ideal responses are unlikely to generate blowback, but anything else needs consent. Consent is tricky; there is a point where someone's behavior becomes a public problem and it is no longer up to the target to decide whether other people can take action. But in general it is best to err on the side of consent and avoiding increasing harm to the target.
- The first step is noticing when this happens. Encourage people to try paying more attention to who speaks and gets credit in meetings (this will require speaking less for some people for a while).
- Note that if you are the subject this is happening to, you have few options. This is why an ally needs to do this.

Scenario: Mailing list post uses a woman as an example of an ignorant group

On a mailing list in your community, someone writes "How would you explain this [technical thing] to your girlfriend?" (Using a woman as an example of a technically unsavvy person.)

Ideal responses:
- Always reply publicly - everyone on the list has seen this email, so everyone needs to see a response or they will think that behavior is normal.
- Public reply, no flame war version: "Did you mean, how would I explain this to a technically unsavvy person? Then I would [answer their question]."
- Public reply, okay with starting a fight version: "I am tired of people using women as examples of technically unsavvy people. Plenty of women are experts in this area [name some if you want]. I want a code of conduct for this list/want the moderators to enforce the code of conduct."
- If the list has a code of conduct that prohibits this, put it into the footer of the list.
- Reply privately in addition to a public reply if you have reason to think they want to be supportive of women but didn't realize the effect of their example: "Hey, I know you had no intention of doing this, but when you used girlfriend as an example, you were reinforcing the idea that women aren't interested or welcome in this area." In any case,

it also requires a public response to send the message to the people listening that this isn't acceptable behavior.

Bad:
- ● Suggesting "parent" or other older person and replacing sexism with agism.
- ● Suggesting a person of a particular profession (classism).
- ● Very young people are a valid example, but it's best to avoid specific examples altogether and go with saying what you mean - "technically unsavvy person."
- ● Focus on just replying with examples of women who are experts in this area. That is popular but needs to be combined with the above techniques.

Points to cover:
- ● This scenario has some other assumptions built-in: that the reader is male, heterosexual, and relatively young. Point those out.

Preparation tips:
- ● Read the Geek Feminism page on the topic "So simple a mother could do it."

Tip: Charles Rules of Argument

Often people have had such miserable experiences with flame wars - long back-and-forth discussions on mailing lists that escalate into name-calling or other unpleasant behavior - that they will refuse to consider replying publicly when someone is being sexist. Charles' Rules of Argument (Geek Feminism edition) are a great way to help people feel like they can reply without giving up the next three days of their life. Short version:

- ● 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 instead

Scenario: Harassment in online group chat

You are in an IRC channel (chat room) when someone says to a person they perceive as female: "So, are you single?" outside of the context of a relevant discussion.

Ideal responses:
- ● Respond publicly, "We don't do that here."
- ● If your project has an enforceable code of conduct, write, "You're violating the code of conduct for this project. Here is the link [link]." Report them using the instructions in the code of conduct.
- ● If your project has a code of conduct, link to it in the channel topic.

- If your project doesn't have a code of conduct, encourage adoption of one. Sample codes of conduct: http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Code_of_conduct. Evaluations of codes of conduct: http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Code_of_conduct_evaluations.
- Ask the channel operator or channel to kick or ban the user (or do it yourself if you are one).

Bad:
- Send a private message to the target apologizing for the harasser. The user doesn't want a private apology from a bystander, they want someone to publicly stick up for them. By privately apologizing, you are implicitly asking them to give you emotional reassurance and focusing the interaction on yourself.
- Ask the harasser whether they are single - that's harassment too. If the person isn't male, you can't reverse sexual harassment by flipping the gender - society treats the sexualization of men and women completely differently.

Points to cover:
- Point out that it is extremely rare to see this kind of harassment in public - it usually happens in private. So they should jump on it if they see it. Point out that feminine nicknames get 25 times the malicious private messages that masculine nicknames get.
- Some people may not see the problem in inquiring about someone's relationship status. Point out that women get more scrutiny and judgement around their relationship status and that this is often a form of unwelcome sexual advance.
- Avoid derailment along the lines of "Perhaps this situation really is okay in context." If you can't tell whether or not it is okay as a bystander, then that is a problem in itself.

Tip: Read the Captain Awkward advice blog

During this section, people are likely to ask questions like "How do I get someone to stop doing something without upsetting anyone?" (Hint: you can't.) Direct them to the Captain Awkward advice blog: http://captainawkward.com. Captain Awkward answers questions on social interaction from an awkward, geeky perspective. You can also reframe this kind of question as, "Someone is already upset: you, and anyone else this behavior is harming." Often the problem is we value the feelings of the more powerful person than multiple less powerful people.

Scenario: Performance reviews are biased against women

You are part of a yearly performance review process. Several women's reviews criticize them for being abrasive, aggressive, or unfriendly to co-workers. Few (or none) of the men's reviews have similar comments. (Emotional care of co-workers is not part of the women's job descriptions.)

Presentation tip: Immediately go to the next slide with a quote from the research before starting the discussion to show that it is a widespread problem of bias against women.

Otherwise participants will spend most of their time talking about whether the woman actually was abrasive or if this was sexist.

Ideal responses:
- Go to management with a request to change the review process to be more objective and fair, and to discourage personality critiques.
- Start a discussion about the culture of leadership at this organization. If the leadership culture is itself abrasive and otherwise incompatible with our stereotypes of a "good woman" but compatible with stereotypes about male leadership, this kind of imbalance in performance reviews is often a sign.
- Ask for unconscious bias training that results in people lowering their bias (some kinds of unconscious bias training make people feel like it is okay to have that bias and actually increase biased actions afterwards).

Bad:
- Ask the person who wrote the review to go into detail about exactly what the women did. Presumably the idea is to show that the woman wasn't actually abrasive. But the problem is that everyone is abrasive, just men get away with it.
- Talk to the women about how to appear less abrasive or get them training.

Points to cover:
- At some point, ask the participants if they think the women in the company are actually more abrasive and aggressive than the men. This helps refocus on the problem: women can't behave in ways that men can, and often these forbidden behaviors are key to being a leader in their organization.
- If people ask what their position is in this scenario, tell them to talk about what they could do in their current position in this kind of situation: individual contributor, line manager, head of HR, whatever. The workshop is about figuring out what our position of power is and what we can do in that position, not fantasizing about what we would do if we had more power.

Scenario: Someone makes a sexist joke at a work event, while drinking

At a party at work, someone makes a joke about how much sex a co-worker must have had in order to produce their children. Everyone is holding an alcoholic drink.

Presentation tip: People will often demand to know the genders of the people involved in this scenario. Don't give them an answer, just tell them to talk about how different genders would affect the scenario.

Ideal responses:
- "Awwwwkward."
- "We don't do that around here."
- Silently leave the area.

- Consider bringing it up with the joker's manager.
- Have a discussion at work about the rules still applying when people are drinking.
- Reduce signals that excessive alcohol consumption and associated bad behavior are welcome in your workplace (see Kara Sowles' "[Alcohol and Inclusivity: Planning Tech Events with Non-Alcoholic Options](#)", included on the example handout).

Bad:
- Wait for the woman who "usually" speaks up about these things to say something.
- Make a joke in reply. It is really hard to tell how serious people are in this context, and it is likely to backfire.

Points to cover:
- Make sure people get that women can't win when co-workers are talking about sex: while for men there's a wide range of "acceptable" amounts of sex, women are either having too much sex or too little, and being judged for it.
- In the discussion, emphasize that workplace rules against sexual harassment and assault still apply when everyone is drinking.
- At an appropriate point, advance to the next slide, which includes a [quote from research showing that alcohol does not physically cause people to become sexually inappropriate or violent](#) - that's all culturally mediated.
- Reassure people that it's okay if they giggle nervously or freeze up. It's okay to say, "I'm sorry, that wasn't actually funny, I just laughed because I was so surprised anyone would say that," or to wait and address it after the event if they are too shocked in the moment.
- If you have time, talk about how this situation can also be religiously discriminatory, and that it could be unintentionally harming people who have recently miscarried, or are having trouble conceiving, just found out they were infertile, etc.
- If anyone argues that the scenario wouldn't be sexist if only men were present, advance to the next slide and explain it.

Tip: Why talking about sex at work harms women

In the previous scenario, people will often ask whether it's okay if everyone involved is male, or if there are any situations in which talking about sex at work is okay. This slide is an opportunity to explain sexual objectification of women, the sexual double standard for women, and how talking about sex triggers discrimination against women. Read more about [objectification on the Geek Feminism wiki](#), but here are the points from the slide:

- In many societies, women are sexually objectified far more than men
- Objects != people
- Women's participation in sex is viewed far more negatively than men's
- Talking about sex at work often triggers objectification, discrimination, harassment of women
- If on-topic, must be done CAREFULLY

Scenario: Someone tells you that you have done something sexist

Someone tells you that you have said or done something sexist. You didn't mean to be sexist and don't consider yourself a sexist person.

Ideal responses:
- Apologize immediately and sincerely, then go do some research on your own to figure out what happened and whether it was sexist. If your research tells you that what you did was indeed sexist, apologize again more specifically and list what you are going to do to prevent it in the future.

Bad:
- Refuse to apologize.
- Apologize without taking responsibility - "I'm sorry if you were offended."
- Start listing all the feminist causes you have supported as proof you aren't sexist.
- Even worse: Start listing the women you work with or are related to.

Points to cover:
- Many people will object to apologizing before they are sure they were wrong. Point out that it is a small cost in ego for a big benefit in a marginalized person's life, and that they are modeling behavior for other people.
- Be sure to point out that "if you were offended" doesn't belong in an apology.
- Talk about how to experience the feelings of anger without acting on them right away, and wait for them to subside before taking action.

Scenario: Someone criticizes a woman's behavior using sexist terms

On social media, someone complains publicly about a woman in your community for being too "aggressive," "loud," "out of line," etc.

Ideal response:
- Reply publicly with "This is an example of the tone argument: http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone_argument"
- Reply publicly with "Funny, if a man were doing that, he'd probably be praised"

Bad:
- Give advice to the woman they are complaining about on how to present their argument better, seem less aggressive, etc.
- Argue that the woman isn't actually aggressive, loud, etc. while implicitly accepting that these things are negative for women.

Tips:
- Most of the purpose of this scenario is to get people talking about why this kind of language is a problem. The short version is that people use criticism of the way people

say something (the "tone") as a way to ignore what people are saying. Some subjects are inherently unpleasant for people in power to hear (such as "you have personally benefited from generations of colonial occupation and enslavement") and thus the tone argument will always apply.
● Discuss how the same behaviors may get different labels for men and women, and some descriptions are negative for women but positive for men ("aggressive," "ambitious," "dominant").

Scenario: I asked a woman and she said it wasn't sexist

In an all-male discussion, you point out a decision that will be probably unpopular with women. Someone replies "I asked my [female partner/friend/relative] about it, and she isn't offended by it."

Ideal responses:
● "Your [female partner/friend/relative] doesn't speak for all women. And there's nothing about being a woman that automatically makes her not sexist."

Bad:
● "My [female partner/friend/relative] is offended by it." This is less effective than pointing out that one woman can't speak for all women or define what is and isn't sexist.

Tips:
● The key to this scenario is reframing it to point out that the person is choosing only to listen to the women who agree with them. Also, often the woman in question has a relationship with the person that would make it difficult to disagree with them (e.g., spouses, relatives, people who report to them).

Scenario: A conference your company is sponsoring features sexist advertising

You are attending a conference your company is sponsoring, and you notice a booth with "booth babes" or sexist advertising.

Ideal responses:
● Use your position of influence as an employee of a sponsor: complain to the person in charge of sponsorship, get the appropriate person to contact the booth owner, complain to the conference organizer and point out your position as a sponsor.
● Sponsor only events that have good codes of conduct, or require the conference to have a code of conduct to receive funding.
● If private communication doesn't work, post about it publicly if you are in a position where you are willing to risk retaliation.

Bad:

- Confronting the booth owner directly (unless you are the person in charge of sponsorship). This is less effective because it frames the discussion as "one offended person" rather than "potential withdrawal of sponsorship money.
- Worry that a ban on booth babes will be used against women attendees who are dressed attractively (meaning: dressed in ways heterosexual men find sexually pleasing). The problem isn't attractive women (or people) at the conference, or the way they dress, it's companies turning women into sexual objects to sell their products and assuming their customers are heterosexual men who enjoy objectifying women. See here for [good wording on a booth-babe ban](#).

Points to cover:
- Discuss learning to recognize when you are in a position of power or influence and use it.
- Learn more about why booth babes are a problem at: http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Booth_babes

Scenario: All-male panel

You receive an invitation to a panel. You are male, and so is everyone else on the panel.

Ideal responses:
- Contact the panel moderator asking if they noticed the panel was all women. Suggest women to add or take your place.
- Consider refusing to serve on the panel or making a public pledge not to serve on all-male panels.

Bad:
- Use guilt to coerce women into appearing on the panel.

Points to cover:
- Discuss learning to notice when this happens.
- Discuss the effect of people thinking of people they know, and how you tend to know people like yourself.
- To get more diverse panels, start outreach early, explicitly invite women, offer to cover travel expenses or pay an honorarium (women are often compensated less).
- Be honest about the fact that, for most people, this means giving up power and influence in favor of someone else. Talk about how this is easier to do at some stages of your career than others.

Scenario: You see someone grope a woman without her consent

You're standing at a party, and out of the corner of your eye, you see someone grab a woman's butt. She looks surprised, angry, or moves away (i.e., it is clearly not consensual).

Ideal responses:
- In all cases: Take a good look at the groper: What is the person wearing? What do the person look like? Does the person have a badge with a name on it? Does anyone recognize the person? Take a picture if you can do so safely, or ask other people for pictures or identifying details.
- In all cases: Do not give a name or description of the victim without her explicit consent, as she may be retaliated against or not want to be involved for many other similar reasons.
- Report the groper to the party organizer and ask for the person to be thrown out.
- Report the groper to the organizer of any other associated event or organization (a conference, the hotel, etc.) and ask for the person to be thrown out.
- Offer your support to the victim in a non-intrusive way: "I saw that person grope you. I will back you up if you want to complain to anyone. I can describe the person. Here is my contact information. Can I help you find a friend or security or anyone else?"
- Tell other people about the groper, in person or online. It's considered polite to tell the organizers first and give them a chance to respond. That said, you don't have an obligation to keep silent for fear of making them look bad.

Bad:
- Punch the groper. Great, now you are the jerk, you're probably getting kicked out, and did you really want to spend the rest of the day talking to the police?
- Insist the victim report the incident to the organizers, security, or the police. Women have hundreds of very good reasons not to report assault, but here's one: When women do report assault, it's often standard police practice to grill a woman on what she was wearing, whether she was drinking, or whether she was flirting - in general, to treat her like a liar and make her relive the assault. If the assault is prosecuted, the defense will usually investigate the victim's background and work to defame her character. Respect her decision so you do not re-victimize her.
- Insist on escorting the victim. Let her choose who she feels safe around, and help her find those people in a way she's comfortable with. She's just been groped, she's probably not thrilled about trusting another random dude, no matter how good your intentions are.
- Identify the victim to others without her explicit consent (unless such identification is required under the law). She may not want to become the public focus of the community's collective rage ([see this post for an example of what can happen](#)). In this case, you can still report the incident without identifying the victim or requiring her cooperation, but if you can't, respect her decisions.

Scenario: Pornography in a presentation

You are attending a talk at a conference. The presenter clicks to the next slide, and you see a pornographic image. Pornography is not on-topic for the conference, or it is and the presenter did not follow best practices for their community.

Ideal responses:
- Walk out of the talk.
- Stay in the talk and document the incident and any subsequent incidents using photos, notes, social media, or other tools.
- Find the nearest conference staff member and tell them what is happening. Ask that the conference director be immediately informed. Follow up at regular intervals to make sure your complaint didn't get lost.
- If the conference has an anti-harassment policy, follow its directions for reporting incidents.

Bad:
- Debate whether the image was actually pornographic or offensive, and to what degree.

Points to cover:
- Someone may ask why pornography in this context is harmful to women. See http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Sexually_objectifying_presentation for reasons why.
- Avoid derailment on the topic of whether all pornography is misogynist. This is a subject of debate within mainstream feminist communities. Most feminists agree that pornography would not be appropriate in this situation.

Scenario: You read an unfamiliar word or phrase

You are reading something written by a feminist somewhere on the Internet and see an unfamiliar word like "cis-sexism" or "intersectionality."

Ideal responses:
- Type "cis-sexism" and "intersectional" into Google. Add "geek feminism" if the first results don't help (this is a good technique in general).
- If you have more questions, look for some first-person blog posts from people who have first-person experience with them, or have studied them. Treat it as you would treat learning anything else: do your homework and keep trying for several days or weeks.
- If you have done fairly extensive research and can't find the answers you are looking for, politely ask the person for their favorite resource on the topic.

Bad:
- Reply asking them what cis-sexism is, in 140 characters or fewer, please.
- Read a few web pages on intersectionality, then send them an email with your logical arguments for why it doesn't apply in this case.
- Next time you're at the same event, start a long conversation about the topic.
- Explain why using jargon is harmful to the feminist cause. (Jargon is extremely important for discussion within a group of experts.)

Points to cover:
- ● Women's time is often considered to be less valuable than men's. Women are also expected to make their time and expertise available to everyone for free.
- ● Use similar situations in the participants' usual field of endeavor where self-education is the norm, and ask whether they would insist on another person educating them directly.

Scenario: Why not just knee him in the groin?

You read a blog post about a woman being sexually harassed at a meeting, and think "Why didn't she just knee him in the groin?"

Ideal responses:
- ● Think, "Surely I'm not the first person to think of this. I wonder if there's a reason women don't do this already?" and search for "why not knee groin geek feminism".
- ● Ask yourself if you are thinking about this from a woman's perspective, or as a man who is embarrassed by the actions of other men. Is this a fantasy scenario?
- ● Think of similar situations that you have experienced: surprised, outnumbered, in a professional setting. What were you thinking? Were you able to think clearly at all?
- ● Work through the logical consequences. What if she does knee him in the groin? Would the police get involved? Would she get kicked out of the meeting? What if she is much smaller? What if she's in a wheelchair, or uses a cane? What if she's a pacifist? Does ending harassment really require women to become martial artists?

Bad:
- ● Write a long comment on the blog post about the proper technique for kneeing someone in the groin.
- ● Send a private email offering to knee him in the groin for her.
- ● Recommend kneeing in the groin and then oppose more practical solutions, such as anti-harassment policies, or banning the person from returning. Because physical violence is an appealing fantasy for many, it can be used to push the responsibility for ending harassment back on to women while appearing to support women.

Points to cover:
- ● Read "Why don't you just hit him?" for a fairly comprehensive review of the issues involved.

Scenario: Deciding where to hold an event

You are responsible for choosing the location of the monthly Linux meetup.

Ideal responses:
- ● Ask women for suggestions or opinions on where to hold the event (privately as well as publicly).

- Look at crime maps of the area (sexual harassment and attacks on women are often correlated with other crimes that are more frequently reported).
- Go to the location at the time of the event and walk through the approach from the public transit stop or from the car or bike parking.

Bad:
- Choose a location with input solely from men.
- Choose a location where women are sexualized: a bar famous for attractive women servers, a strip club, or all of the city of Las Vegas.

Points to cover:
- Avoid activities that are stereotypically male in a way that excludes women.
- Consider the amount and kind of alcohol (if any) carefully - e.g., two drink tickets and wine and beer only will be better than an open bar with hard liquor in terms of likelihood of harassment or assault of women.
- Drinking alcohol does not excuse harassment or assault. Behavior of drunk people varies according to social expectations; set the expectation that they can't harass or assault women. Anyone unable to avoid doing these things while drunk has a responsibility not to drink.
- Have a code of conduct or anti-harassment policy.
- Point people at "Inclusive offsites" by Sara Smollett and others (on the example handout).

Closing Session

The closing session introduces some more advanced ally skills which participants can use to continuing learning how to support women in their communities.

- Don't expect praise and credit for not being sexist or fighting sexism. One aspect of sexism is a feeling of entitlement on the part of men to the attention and gratitude of women, even for actions which should be considered normal.
- Follow and support women leaders rather than becoming a leader yourself. We are socialized to give men's voices more privilege and respect, and if you begin to take action against sexism as a man, you are likely to be turned to more often than equally qualified women. To fight this, support women's leadership and projects and redirect people to them when they approach you for high-prestige projects.
- Assume women have more knowledge and wait for invitation to help or explain. While many of the concepts and skills in this workshop may be new to allies, they are familiar to many women through sheer necessity. Also, offering help directly to women inappropriately, especially to women you don't have a prior relationship with, can be harassing and harmful in itself.
- Follow your discomfort - if something makes you feel bad, find out more and understand the cause of your feelings before reacting. Discomfort is often a reaction to

having your unearned societal advantages pointed out to you, which causes guilt. Learn to identify feelings of discomfort or guilt as an opportunity for learning.

The final slide should include these resources and any others from your organization:
● Slides, video, curriculum at: http://supportada.org/allies
● Geek Feminism Wiki: http://geekfeminism.wikia.com

Thank them for attending and making the workshop great, and then ask them to give themselves a round of applause. If possible, stick around to answer questions for at least 15 minutes.

About the Ada Initiative

The Ada Initiative is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the participation and status of women in open technology and culture communities, which includes open source software, Wikipedia-related projects, open data, open government, remix culture and others. Our activities include producing codes of conduct and anti-harassment policies, advocating for gender diversity, teaching allies, and hosting conferences for women in open tech/culture. Most of what we create, is freely available, reusable, and modifiable under Creative Commons licenses. This entire workshop curriculum and supporting materials are freely available under the CC BY-SA license.