

Allies, Active Bystanders and Gaslighting

presented by Rachel McKinnon at Rice University, March 21, 2014 (2:30)

Thank you, Gwen. Thank you, Richard. Thank you for having me. I'm really impressed that you got this initiative up and going and that this is a multiple iteration of it, so, it wasn't just the one off. Like Carrie, I would like to note that, my primary research areas are not feminism, even though this is probably what I'm best known for, and that is the capacity in which I will be talking today. What I want to talk about are problems that I see with the concept and deployment of allies and what's known as "ally culture", and how that connects to what's a new-ish term "gaslighting", and I'm going to connect that to epistemic injustice. I'm going to argue against the concept and deployment of allies and ally cultures. I'm going to talk about a lot of problems that are going on with this. Roughly, I'll argue that allies are creating more harm than good. I'll argue that we should replace the concept of allies with active bystanders and I'll finish with some thoughts about how we move forward.

So, what is gaslighting? The etymology is a little bit hard to track. Most people think it started with a 1938 play, and it's more popularly known by the 1944 movie called, "Gaslight." It takes 2 forms. The form that's deployed in the movie and the play is one of psychological warfare, psychological abuse, where people try to convince, typically women or other disadvantaged groups that they're crazy, that they're not perceiving things properly. The form that I'll be talking about is much more subtle, and it's usually much more less intentional. And I'll connect it to epistemic injustice.

Pretend that you're at a Christmas party at the end of a long semester. It's Friday night. It's been a long week. You've finished your grading. You're trying to cut loose a little bit and relax. You have a drink. Other people are drinking. And you're in a conversation with four people, one whom is your department chair (not Richard) who says something sexist, something like, to a graduate student in Philosophy, "You know, women just aren't good at logic, maybe you should go into ethics or something." Something inappropriate. And, really worried by this, you talk to some of your colleagues who were also at the party but maybe didn't hear that comment, and so maybe you have the following texting exchange with someone. You say that you're really upset. And they just say, "Well, you're overreacting. He's a good guy. He wouldn't do that." Now, we're in the realm of gaslighting. Here are a whole bunch of different forms it might take. You might also be told, "Oh please! This is bound to happen when someone is tired, stressed, drinking..." --pick your adjective. Or maybe you're on Facebook, chatting with someone, and someone says, "Look! Don't be so upset. It's not that serious. It was just a joke." Or maybe in complaining about this as a wider pattern, someone tells you, "Look, this is just going to happen where ever you go, you need to get used to it." Or they might say, "Oh, Wow, that sucks, but I've never seen him do that." Or "You're just being emotional, Calm down."

All these are instances of gaslighting. From some of the giggles, I suspect you've heard these sorts of phrases too.

Well, I want to connect gaslighting to epistemic injustice, to do a little epistemology here. I'll be building on the great work by Miranda Fricker in her book *Epistemic Injustice*. Epistemic injustice is when there's a pattern of incredulity, misinterpretation, or silencing where we don't take the speaker at their word. We don't treat them as a prima facie reliable resource of information. We don't give them the appropriate epistemic authority, as a speaker, as a testifier. As Fricker says, there's a credibility deficit. Now, she talks about 2 different forms, and I'm going to focus on what she calls testimonial injustice, and that's where we have this credibility deficit based on someone's identity, which can be intersectional, so a woman, a person of color, queer, disabled, so on.

Epistemic injustice, especially gaslighting, happens a lot when we're talking about harassment or sexual assault. Let's say that also at this horrible Christmas party, another person was sexually harassed, Jane, and she wants to complain to, probably the department chair, and based on her being a woman, he will dismiss, discount, or doubt her claim that what she said happened really happened. That might take different forms. It might be: "Oh well, what were you wearing? You probably came on to him." All these sorts of forms end in a case of testimonial injustice. Jane has asserted some proposition that a harassment has happened, and the person hearing it doesn't believe her on the basis of her testimony, partly because she's a woman. That's testimonial injustice.

Gaslighting--I think, when we hear things like, "Well, he's a good guy, he wouldn't do that, besides he's married," which is something that was said to someone who just came out to me last week about a sexual assault. Gaslighting and this form of epistemic injustice is really common, and it's a really big problem. The point should be that speaker testimony ought to be treated as a prima facie reason to treat the claim as true. That's not what happens. In Carrie's talk, she talked a little bit about how philosophers have this self conception of ourselves as rational. We're trained in critical thinking, right? Well, I think philosophers are particularly bad when it comes to epistemic injustice and gaslighting. I think our training in taking some argument and thinking about any possible alternate explanation or theory, no matter how implausible, is a feature common to our profession. So think back to the McGinn case. Or now, the Ludlow case, and the way that people are responding to what might've happened, and you read the blog posts, and the blog comments--look how implausible people are willing to suppose a situation was, rather than just accepting the speaker testimony of what happened. I think philosophy is particularly bad at this. And it's partly because of our training.

So, I'm going to pick on philosophers a lot today. All my examples are examples from philosophers. And now I want to argue against allies and ally culture. What are some of the reasons that allies are problematic? Well, when we have a problem, who do we complain to? Typically, we first go to people that we perceive as allies. We don't first go to people we perceive as hostile. And this creates some problems because if the people we tend to only complain to will be allies, they will be statistically speaking more likely to gaslight us. Just by the sheer numbers game. Even though if we contrast allies to people that are hostile to us, the hostile people might be more likely to gaslight, but we're not going to them. So we only go to the allies. That's why they're more likely to gaslight. The big problem, though, and this I'm going to focus on is that allies are really hostile to criticism for un-ally-like behavior.

When we call them out they often respond not by saying, “Oh my gosh, you're right I screwed up”...they attack. And we had a nice high profile instance of this, just a couple weeks ago, with a certain Brian Leiter and me. But I want to talk about a distinction that I came across of calling out versus calling in. This is based on a blog post called, “Calling in a Less Responsible Way of Holding Each Other Accountable.” I put the link on your handout. The idea is that one way of distinguishing calling out is that it's public, the main purpose is often to shame, and it's meant as the end of a conversation. Now, while the Gendered Conference Campaign and posting links to conferences with all-male lineups isn't really meant to shame, that's kind of its function. That's kind of the net effect. And when the posts go up on Feminist Philosophers-- I think they're good reasons for this—they don't have comments. It's not meant to be conversation, it's meant just to point the bad behavior out, and that's it. That's calling out.

Calling in is a little bit different. While it's also public, it's about getting the person who did the wrong thing to own their mistake and to use this as the beginning of a conversation. Generally, a healing conversation. Now, while it's difficult when you're the person who has been harmed when you have these calling in conversations, you have to work hard to have compassion and patience for the person you're conversing with. You have to try to understand that look--being called out sucks, it does hurt. Even though we don't want to focus on their pain, we have to at least take that into some consideration. So when we call out, that's where we're ending conversation. Sometimes ending friendships. I've certainly ended friendships over bad crap people have done when I've tried to call them in. I tried to have a calling in, and it ended up turning into a calling out, and then an ended friendship. Calling out is when we just draw attention to the error, and basically, nothing else, whereas calling in is trying to get someone to own up to something that they did wrong, and then, you have a conversation about it.

Here's an instance that happened a couple weeks ago on Facebook with one of my friends. So I posted a story, “Offbeat Families.” It's about a cis lesbian dyke woman who has a child but identifies as the father. Does not identify as “mother.” Don't call her the mother. Not only, does she identify with the social gender role stereotypes of fatherhood, but she dis-identifies with the social role gender stereotypes of mother. Even though she still considers herself a woman. Here's the comment my friend posted:

“I certainly think that she should choose the identity that suits her, but these stereotypes are harmful to many, and sometimes it's important to see someone who challenges the norm. It's too bad that the term mother is so stereotyped that she can't use it. There are lots of reasons you may not want to be a girl, but if one of them is that you think you can't play sports, isn't that a shame?”

I don't think this is the worst comment in the world, but I do think there's some serious problems with it. Especially coming with a perspective of how things like, “Well, she should still call herself the mother, and then just challenge the stereotypes and norms of motherhood, why can't she just do that?” was essentially the content behind this comment, and in the context of this comment, came out especially when we're talking about gender nonconforming people, you have to understand that a lot of people turn to transgender people when they're transitioning and say, “Well, if you just want to wear make up and wear dresses and whatnot, why can't you do that and still be a boy? Why can't you just change what it means to be a boy?” This is a form of dismissal that people

often use for gender nonconforming people. And that's what I saw in her comment. I saw it as a problem. So I mentioned it in Facebook, and the point I wanted to make to her is that she saw an identity box, and while imperfect in a global sense, we have to understand that being able to look into society as a way of relating to each other is comfortable. Having a box is comfortable. And so, we can't begrudge her for having a comfortable box.

Here's a really nice example of this box-seeking behavior, and it's my girlfriend. She's a cis lesbian, but she's not butch. She's not femme. These are essentially the only two identities that get pushed in lesbian cultures, so she didn't have a box, she didn't know how to relate to other lesbians in the culture, how to talk about herself. So she's somewhere in between femme and butch--she's complicated and that's a good thing. And she found it really stressful that she didn't have a box, and back in November, she read an essay by S. Bear Bergman called "Diesel Femme," and it described her perfectly. She had a box. She cried. Having a box for people is really important for people. So while, yes, in a broad sense it's great to challenge stereotypes, we have to realize that sometimes fitting social norms is comfortable, and so we can't begrudge the person for doing that. And this was the conversation I had with my friend. And it was a good conversation. I think this was one of the most successful calling ins I've had. She recognized that what she said, while not intended to be that way, had that reading, it had that problem.

So good calling ins have certain features. The first is that the person who gets called in has to take public accountability for what they did, which involves a public acknowledgment. While our conversation was mostly private, she went back into the public thread and said, "You're right. I screwed up. Thanks for having the conversation." Far too often, we keep it private. We don't make the public acknowledgement.

Okay, so, let's say that you want to call someone in, or call someone out. Where should our focus be? You could either focus on what they did or who they are. And we should focus on what they did. Don't focus on who they are. If you want to say to someone that that comment was sexist, you don't want to say that you are sexist. So here's a really awesome video:

[Video Text] Race: the final frontier. No matter what channel you watch. No matter what feed you aggregate. It seems like everybody everywhere is talking about race right now. When everybody everywhere is talking about race, that means sooner or later you're gonna have to tell somebody that they said something that sounded racist. So, you need to be ready and have a plan in place for how to approach the inevitable, "That sounded racist" conversation. And I'm going to tell you how to do that.

The most important thing that you've got to do is remember the difference between the *what they did* conversation and the *what they are* conversation. Those are two totally different conversations, and you need to make sure that you pick the right one. The what they did conversation focuses strictly on the person's words and actions and explaining why what they did and what they said was unacceptable. This is also known as the "That thing you said was racist" conversation, and that's the conversation that you want to have. The what they are conversation, on the other hand, takes things one step further and uses what they did and what they said to draw conclusions about what kind of person they are. This is also known as the "I think you are a racist" conversation.

This is the conversation you don't want to have. Because that conversation takes us away from the facts of what they *did*, and to speculation about their motives and intentions and

those are things you can only guess at, that you can't ever prove, and that makes it way too easy for them to derail your whole argument. And that is the part that's crucial to understand. When you say, "I think he's a racist," that's not a bad move because you might be wrong. That's a bad move because you might be right. Because if that dude really is racist, you want to make sure you hold him accountable and don't let him off easy. And even though intuitively it feels like the hardest way to hit him is just run up on him and say, "I think your a** is racist," when you handle it that way, you're actually letting him off easy because you're setting up a conversation that's way too simple for him to derail and duck out of.

Just think about how this plays out every time a politician or celebrity gets called out there. It always starts out as a what they did conversation, but as soon as the celebrities and their defenders get on camera, they start doing judo flips and switching into a what they are conversation. "I have known this person for years, and I know for a fact that they are not a racist. And how dare you claim to know what's inside their soul just because they made one little joke about watermelon tap dancing and going back to Africa." And then you try to explain that we don't need to see inside his soul to know that he shouldn't have said all that about the watermelon, and you try to focus on the facts of the situation, but by then, it's too late because the what-they-are conversation is a rhetorical Bermuda Triangle, where everything drowns in a sea of empty posturing until somebody just blames it all on hip hop, and we forget the whole thing every happened.

Don't let this happen to you. When somebody picks my pocket, I'm not going to be chasing him down to figure out whether he feels like he's a thief deep down in his heart, I'm going to be chasing him down so I can get my wallet back. I don't care what he is, but I need to hold him accountable for what he did. And that's how we need to approach these conversations about race. Treat them like they took your wallet and focus on the part that matters, holding each person accountable for the impact of their words and actions. I don't care what you are. I care about what you did. [End of video text]

So, I can't recommend this video enough. I link to it a lot on Facebook. I send it to my students. I send it to friends. The message of accountability is key and the message about accountability for actions, not who you are. I just had this conversation yesterday, in fact, in the airport before I was flying over here, about someone's blog post from a view years ago about what counts as philosophy and what doesn't. A few recent more high profile articles have been picking on that post as being problematic. And other philosophers were defending the original blog post person because he's really an ally. But that's not the conversation we're having. The conversation we're having is that the blog post has problems. We're not talking about whether he has problems. That's what I want us to focus on too.

The other important point is: I care about actions. I don't care about intentions. I think philosophers are far too deontological when we think about how things happen. We care way too much about intentions. We don't care that it had a bad outcome. Often when someone says something bad or does something bad and you say, "Hey this was bad, this hurt", they respond "oh but I didn't intend that." Well, good for you, I don't care. I just care that it hurt. So, I want you to focus on that too. I want you to focus on actions and outcomes, not intentions. I'm not saying intentions don't matter at all. Certainly, someone who says something racist and means it, is worse than someone who says something racist and doesn't. But they still said something racist. We have to hold them accountable for what they did, not what they intended.

Here's an instance of something that happened to me at the University of Waterloo, where I did my PhD. Sitting in a room having a conversation with a couple friends. All three of us women. All three of us feminists. All three of us, in a sense,

feminist philosophers. And the friend to my left, Kay, asked me whether or not I got the department slow-pitch team going that summer because we had the year before and had a lot of fun. I was saying, "No I didn't, but hey, Cee over here did agree to play for us. Isn't that awesome?" At which point, Cee said, "Yeah, but I throw like a girl." Now, coming from a feminist, that's kind of weird, right? Both of us jumped on her, and said, "No, you don't throw like a girl, you just throw poorly."

Like this comic says, father-to-son, "You throw like a girl raised in a patriarchal society that discourages women from participating in sports." So we criticized: Not throw like a girl, you throw poorly. That's fine. She acknowledges it and then here's her response, "Well, I throw like a girl without a penis." And as a trans-woman sitting 5 feet away from her, my jaw was on the floor. This is super sexist. This is transmisogynistic. This is not okay. And my response was basically I gasped out, "Wow" and then left. And then, she, to some credit, apologized to me about a half hour later, but almost immediately, we got into the: "but, I didn't mean it. That was not my intention. What I meant..." --Okay, I don't care, you said this horrible thing. Stop it at that. I don't want to hear about your intentions. In fact, that conversation is just aggravating me more. Because now it sounds like you're trying to defend yourself, rather than just taking accountability for what you did.

So when you're called out, remember that it's what you said, not what you intended. Particularly for the person harmed. They do not care about your intentions. And you're bringing your intentions in makes it worse. When you get called out, or when you get called in, what you have to do first is relax. We all understand that being called out sucks, especially publicly. But you can't immediately go on the attack. You have to reflect on what you actually did, what you actually said. And reflect on it from their perspective too. Not just thinking about what you actually meant or intended. Think about what you actually said and what effect it might've actually had on the affected people. And then, apologize. Just say you're sorry.

In some of the research on what is involved in a genuine apology, you never make excuses. When you make a genuine apology, you do not make excuses, you do not make explanations; so, just say you're sorry.

And the last two points, are that you have to own it and then, commit to not doing it again. And often, that step never gets reached. So if you say something super sexist, apologize and then say, "I'm sorry that was horrible. Won't happen again."

Of course, that's a kind of promise, and it might still happen again, but at least you're showing the other person that you're owning your bad behavior and that you're going to try to do better next time. And of course, do better next time. ...But all too often, when something bad happens, people apologize and that's it. But that can't be it. You have to do better and commit to the person you harmed to doing better.

Now, when you're called out, that process especially if it's a calling in, is not about you. It's not about your feelings, it's not about how uncomfortable you are. It's not that you're unhappy for being called out publicly or whatever. Don't make it about you. too often what we have are versions of what's called the "tone" argument. Where we say things like, "Well, c'mon you attract more flies with honey rather than vinegar." Or more often, the "You need to calm down before we have this conversation."

Back at the University of Waterloo, I had a lot of problems. I got pronounced a lot, even by the department chair. When I turned to an ally, I got sent an e-mail with all sorts of gaslighting in it. "Look, he's really an ally. He's really a good guy. It's the end of a long week. He had a couple drinks." Classic, classic gaslighting. And, I wanted to confront her about it, but I couldn't because at the time I was a sessional instructor, and she and the chair were the 2 people in charge of doling out teaching assignments. So I was in this massive power disadvantage. I wasn't in a place to confront them.

Now, I also have a blog, which is on your handout it's Metamorpho-Sis, where I talked about these things, but I anonymized all the details. Didn't use any names. I didn't even use positions. And she thought my blogging about what happened and her gaslighting was completely inappropriate. Four months later, when I was actually ready to have this calling in conversation, because I had my post-doc and tenured track job, she said, "No, it's too late, you should have talked to me right away. The time for that conversation is gone." And she's essentially cut off conversation. That's a "tone" argument. "You said these things about me even though they were anonymized, and now, the conversation has to be on my terms, you didn't meet those terms. Too bad, we're not having the conversation."

Now one of the problems, often, when someone gives the tone argument, especially when they're being called out, remember, you hurt someone. They're upset, and anger is a completely appropriate response to being harmed. But all too often the person being called out or called in makes it about them and how uncomfortable they are. But you can't let them do that. Here's this fantastic thing that Melissa Draper calls the "toes" clause, "If you tread on someone's toes and they tell you to get off, then get off and apologize. Don't tell them to ask nicely." When someone's calling you out for having harmed them, then make it be about them. Don't make it about you.

These are problems. But I think these are big problems that allies engage in all the time. Remember, the person who, one, gaslit me, and two, used the tone argument and three, shut off conversation, is the person everyone considers the top ally in the department. This was a common pattern. Not just in my department. Not just with me. But all over. One of the reasons I think this is has to do with how we conceive of what it means to be an ally, and that we wear it as an identity badge. Literally, these are actual badges, that people have actually made that say they're an ally. They wear it as a badge. And some of these are almost nonsensical. This one I laugh at the most, "100% Straight," whatever that means, "100% Ally" and "100% happy" ...It just blows my mind. When we wear ally as an identity, really bad things happen. One of them is the hostility and resistance to criticism.

So when you criticize an ally, sometimes they attack back and they say things like, "Oh, come on! I'm doing my best," or "Why can't you just be grateful?" (That's one I've gotten a few times.) And other times, "Well, if you're just going to criticize me for trying to be an ally, maybe I just shouldn't try. I'm just going to take my ball and go home." If some of you happened to read the Brian Leiter post before he took it down, and then, whitewashed it, one of the things he ended with was, "Don't worry these people, these crazy McKinnons aren't alienating me, I'm still an ally." Utterly resistant to criticism. One of the problems is that we get to wear this identity badge whether or not we've ever done any ally-like behavior ever. You just say you identify as an ally, "Give me a badge," and then you conceive of yourself as an ally.

Leiter still conceives of himself as an ally. Explicitly. He said so. Even though he's done things like attack a female graduate student and then call me an untenured professor, singularly unhinged and crazy. Those are not ally behaviors. You don't get to keep the identity in the face of counter-evidence. And yet, that's what people do. Because when you have an identity, counter-instances to that identity don't shift your self-conception. This is a problem broadly with just allies and ally culture. Because we wear it as an identity, it produces these effects.

And so, let's talk a little bit about this "But I'm an ally" stuff. A really prominent instance of this happened recently with the meltdown of Piers Morgan over the appearance of Janet Mock, a transgender woman of color on his show. While she was on his show, he used a lot of problematic phrases and tropes and sensationalization of her life, saying things like, "Oh, well, you were born a man, right?" To which, I think she gloriously responded, "No, I was born a baby." And in the graphics under her image during the interview, which she can't see while she's doing the interview it had things like, "Was a man until 18," which is explicitly how she does not identify with her gendered past. So when she saw the show afterwards and saw the graphics, she tweeted about it being a problem. She said, "Piers Morgan, I was not formerly a man. Please stop sensationalizing my life and misgendering transwomen." And then she tags her book. And there was an explosion of Twitter of criticism for Piers Morgan. He was getting called out. In some cases, called in.

How do allies respond to being called out? By attacking the people calling them out, so here's what Piers tweeted in an utter beginning of a meltdown--as my friend Audrey Yap calls, it was the McGinny. "Totally support a 100% equality for LGBT community by the way, and have done so on air, so find all this Janet Mock business utterly ludicrous." Completely dismisses the criticism, which is utterly warranted criticism of him. He continues to tweet after 24 hours of being attacked, "I agree there should be an apology made regarding my interview with Janet Mock, and I expect her to make it to me on air tonight in a follow-up interview." "Apologize to me, your ally, for attacking and criticizing me. Never mind the crappy things I said to and about you." And he kept going, "Being transgender doesn't give you the right to slur, distort, or ridicule someone who supports the issue 100%. Shame on you, Janet Mock."

And he coined this new phrase "cisphobia." That all the attacks of him were cisphobia, which should ring a lot like white people saying of people of color criticizing systems of oppression, "Oh, that's reverse racism." Or men saying of women feminists criticizing systems of oppression, "Well, this is misandry." This is not cisphobia. This is calling out unacceptable behavior. And yet what happens is that the allies attack back. But not just this: they want credit for what they did do good. Piers starts off by saying, "Look, I've done so on air before. Give me credit. Give me my cookie." We call this not just the asking for reward for any good behavior, but the actual demand for praise cookie-seeking behavior. And so, here's a nice little comic:

So here's a blog comment, "Manly man said make me a sandwich, woman!" And Slick, who has a lot of problems with misogyny, says, "That's sexist, yo!" and then, he puts on his cape and says, "I called out sexism. I did. Me. I am social justice." And then, grandma comes in and gives him a cookie, and he says, "I got a cookie. Oh, happy

day!" That's what allies are like. Cookies are this external recognition for doing the right thing. Not only do allies want them, they sometimes demand them. "Give me some credit." Oddly enough, often, allies want credit, or this cookie, for simply not engaging in bad behavior. They want recognition for not being an abject jerk.

In my case, with the University of Waterloo, people said to me that I should give the chair who is mispronouncing me for a long time, some credit. Or I should be grateful for all he's done for my career, and I thought about what he's done for my career because he didn't write me letters of recommendation. All I could think was that he gave me the same level of teaching assignments that I had before I transitioned, the same after as before. So, basically, I should be grateful that he didn't discriminate against me. That's what they're saying. But this is common to ally culture. And so, that's it I'm done--I don't want to talk about ally. If you tell me, I'm an ally, I'm just rolling my eyes because it's bull sh*t. Allies focus on intentions, they wear it as an identity. They're insensitive. They're hostile to criticism. I'm done with allies and ally culture.

In a little bit, I'll talk about what we should replace that with, but before we get there, rather than just talking about all the pragmatic problems with being an ally, I'm going to talk a little bit about a conceptual problem. I think the way that we define an ally is broken anyway. Typically, the way we define an ally is we have different groups of people with different intersectional identities, such that we have in-groups, like a woman of color, and an ally is the out-group member with more social privilege. So the white cis dude is the ally to the black woman in this case. But that's not true.

The sort of people who can stand up to help other people can be other in-group members. A lesbian woman can stand up to an instance of homophobia or lesbophobia to another lesbian woman. It can be another in-group member. Or a person with less social privilege can stand up for someone with more. A queer woman of color can stand up to a cis white lesbian woman or a cis straight woman. So we can support anyone no matter who we are, no matter who they are. So this concept and the deployment of allies is just broken. And not just that. I honestly think ally culture produces more harm than good.

All of the worst instances of gaslighting I've ever heard of, or have ever experienced, came at the hands of allies. Often, one of the problems with gaslighting is that being gaslit by an ally is worse than the thing that we went to complain about. Because it's a kind of betrayal. It creates isolation. "I went to this person whose supposed to help me, and they just dismissed what I'm saying, so now what?] In fact, when shit hit the fan or "things became unbearable" at Waterloo for me, I contacted a bunch of my support group outside the department, and a couple of them just said, "You need to keep your mouth shut and get out. Don't try to call anyone in. Don't talk to anyone --just get out." Because I felt utterly isolated, and that's what allies do to people. Allies isolate people. And yet, these people who did these things still considered themselves allies. In fact, exemplary allies. They're the people the university turns to to do ally training. They're the people who win diversity awards. And yet, they do this crap. So let's just get rid of it.

What should we replace it with? Well, we should replace it with the "active bystander." So, here's a useful quote from Desmond TuTu, "If you're neutral in

situations of injustice, you've chosen the side of the oppressor." Now, I understand that we all have different intersectional identities, different levels of social privilege. We can't always be an active bystander in every situation. It's not safe in many cases. But we have to recognize that we're still there. We are still a bystander no matter who we are. I think Carrie's example of the What It's Like post is fantastic-- about the wax dripping on the nipples. The faculty all nervously laughed. Maybe they all saw that what was said was inappropriate. And yet, every single one of them chose the side of the oppressor. No one did anything. When we see something bad happen, we have a choice. We can be an active bystander or a passive bystander. We're a bystander no matter what, so you've got to choose what kind you'll be in that instance. And all those faculty chose to be passive bystanders. And so, what was the net effect for the person who was affected? Not only did she feel isolated and that maybe they didn't care about her, but it creates this self-doubt that she even properly perceived what happened. It's pernicious.

What should you do? If you see something bad happen, if you're in the social position to do something, if it's not unsafe for you to step up, just do something. Often, the objection I get is, "Rachel, look, I would really love to do something, but I'm really afraid of saying the wrong thing." That's the objection I get all the time. And yet, coming from a position of a person who needs that sort of support, that action, I'll tell you this: imperfect action is better than nothing. Just do something.

And not only do something, but make it visible to the affected person. If someone says something sexist to me at a Christmas party, you need to step in right there and say, "Whoa that was sexist. That's not okay." Don't wait until that night to e-mail them. You have to make your intervention public --to the person affected. That's how you show support. Or, if you do send this sort of e-mail type message, you let the person know that you did that. You show your support. You don't just support them. However, when you let them know that you've got their back, don't look for a cookie. You're not telling them to get praise. You're telling them to show your support. But this also means because imperfect action is better than inaction, it's still an imperfect action. You need to be prepared for criticism.

So you step in, you do something, it's imperfect, it's better than nothing. That person might now attack you for having done something imperfect. Remember, they've just been harmed. They've had their toes stepped on, they're just angry. So don't take it personally. In fact, you should thank them for being willing to have this conversation with you. When you're an active bystander the focus is always on accountability. No one expects you to be perfect. Even when you're a non-active bystander. I mean, I say stupid shit, too. It happens, we're human. But be accountable for when you screw up. Listen to that criticism. Even though you've acted and that's better than nothing, you have to listen to the criticism. Don't defend your actions. Don't say, "Well, I was just doing my best." Okay, we know that. Don't defend. This is not about you. This is about the person trying to tell you what you could've done better or that it wasn't perfect. Which means you should acknowledge that they're willing to tell you this. Because typically, we only criticize the actions of active bystanders if we care about them.

Here's a really powerful way to be a better active bystander. They're called implementation intentions. What you do is you sit and you think about: if something happens, what will I do? Because when you're in the heat of the moment of something bad happening, sometimes you just can't think quick enough about what to do, and

then, you just decide to do nothing. So what you do is think ahead of time: if this type of injustice happens, here's what I'll do. That saves you the cognitive work. You'll be far more likely to be successful. We have tons of psychology data for how this works. For example, when someone's mispronounced, I will...What? What will you do? This is something you can write down. Like on the back of a handout. For example, if someone uses the pronoun he, when it's supposed to be she, what will you do? I'll tell you what I do, I just say "She. It's she. That's what you should've used for this person." I already know ahead of time how I'm going to respond, so, when it happens, it's automatic.

When someone says something racist, I will...What? My response is usually to say, "Whoa, that was racist!" It's pretty easy, but it's also automatic. When a colleague puts down a student, and says that, "You should leave the profession because you're a danger to academic freedom and the rule of law," like a certain Brian Leiter did on a Feminist Philosophers blog, what will you do? Well, you can read what I did. Because I stood up, and I said that's not okay.

As a profession--as people--what we have to do is cultivate active bystanders. Being an active bystander has costs--social costs personal, emotional costs. So we need to think about ways to reduce those costs. Especially when they come up. But also to remove them before they even come up. We need to create spaces to be active bystanders, to praise active bystanders, but not in a cookie-seeking way, but in a behavior modification way. That means that when active bystanders get attacked, like certain people recently did, you publicly support them. Private messages and e-mails of support means a little. It's nice personally, but it's not a real show of support. What they need is public support. So if you've got a blog, or you've got a website, you've got any sort of platform to say so-and-so attacked an active bystander--that was wrong. I'm standing up in support. Do it.

Moving forward, be an active bystander. Make your support visible and public. Be accountable. Thank you. (48:00)