



Strategies of Sensitization
-Workshops with Kristina Marlen-
June, 2020

Dear People,

I have been giving sex-positive workshops for over 8 years now. It has been surprisingly effortless.

I give workshops in which a great diversity of people come together to experience their boundaries and gather more knowledge and depth on the topics of intimacy, closeness, physicality, sexuality, and encounters. I enjoy the fact that people meet in these workshops that would have never found each other "in real life", and in this way receive the opportunity to learn from each other and give each other gifts.

My vision is a truly diverse space, where people of different origins, different genders, different sexual orientations, and assorted ways of life, ranging from bourgeois to anarchist, can encounter and play with each other. Building bridges between worlds - I would describe that as part of my calling.

For you, that means the challenge of encountering each other with the greatest impartiality. I'm asking you to respect what you yourself, and the other person, bring along, even if you may not be able to understand them right away. Each person in the space has a history that deserves respect. Please consider that every encounter can hold the potential for growth, beyond categories such as "sympathy", "attraction", and "desirability".

Give all of us the chance of an open, "non-judgmental" inner space that will allow us to experience the immediacy of the moment. Allow yourself to have experiences that could really be new ones - and aren't defined by stories, preconceptions, or assumptions.

When presence takes the place of history, identification, and beliefs, we create magic. I know that from my work and would love to pass on this knowledge. At this point, I would like to appeal to your ability to open your heart and your range of motion.

At the same time, even when people come together in order to leave behind the categories of their daily lives, in order to experience moments of interpersonal utopia, that doesn't happen in a vacuum. We bring with us into the workshop space the imprints of the culture we live in, including structural power relations. I would like to acknowledge this and sensitize ourselves as a group to this.

Privilege, the word that has been on everyone's lips recently, is often something you cannot feel when you have it.

Even though I would describe myself as an open, liberal, and mindful person, I am fully aware of probably reproducing racist, sexist, and other forms of discrimination - sometimes without being aware of it. Because I am part of a culture in which that is a part of everyday life. That is painful, of course, especially because as a workshop leader, I strive to be a role model, and want to see myself as a critical and political person.

In my opinion, I can become a role model in the moment I sensitize myself, and you, to this topic and encourage you to question your own position - including your own privilege. Consider that you may not be able to relate to certain types of discrimination - simply because you have never been discriminated against due to your gender, your sexual orientation, the color of your skin, or your ethnic identity. In that case, it is good to pause for a moment, and listen: to those for whom those experiences are part of their daily lives.

Here you will find my guidelines, which are in a fragile and open evolution - just as we ourselves are, in the workshop. They are meant to be points of orientation.

* Dear heterosexual people, I know, the world is structured in a way that it feels like everyone is heterosexual. That isn't the case, though. Being hetero is just one of many sexual orientations. Please don't presuppose that the person you're encountering is (also) heterosexual. Rather question why you think that being heterosexual is so self-evident. You could also be much more. :-)

* Please don't make any assumptions about the gender identity of anyone you encounter. Just because you identify someone as male or female, doesn't mean that the person wishes to be addressed as a "man" or a "woman". Try to mindfully listen to them instead, or inquire about the way they see themselves, or which pronouns they use. If you are curious to know more beyond that, inquire whether that person wishes to answer your questions.

* Please don't infer any fundamental characteristics from "being a man" or "being a woman" and project them onto your environment. All kinds of masculinities and femininities are more than welcome in this workshop (and hopefully in life), and can be played with in all directions, and lived joyfully, independently of the sex it says in your passport. To let go of gender stereotypes means more freedom for everybody.

* In my workshops, I have a Beyond Gender policy. That means that I can't guarantee the gender of the people that you will do the individual exercises with. Maybe there won't be a gender balance. Or

it will be diverse and mixed. Please be capable of dealing with the fact that you won't be able to do every exercise with a person you desire. There is something to explore in every encounter, I'm convinced of that!

If that feels unthinkable to you, you can come to the workshop with a set partner. Please talk to me about it beforehand.

* Male socialization often leads to a greater sense of one's own body, one's own space, one's presence in public spaces, speaking time, a feeling of entitlement to contact. By contrast, female socialization trains empathy and caring for others, wanting to please, and repressing one's own needs, including sexual needs. I know that, depending on their disposition, character, and life story, that has a different effect on individual men and women, and can also feel very different. Regardless of whether you perceive yourself like that, let's take care together, as a group, that all the individuals are in touch with their needs and have the courage to communicate them. Let us, on this occasion, be sensitive to structural imbalance, regardless of our own individual feelings.

* Let's face it: we live in a culture of sexual repression, and that has usually meant: repressing female sexuality. There has been and there still is comprehensive control of women's* sexuality. All genders suffer from the legacy of patriarchal structures, but women* have a particular need to catch up.

Therefore, I ask for your understanding if situations arise in my workshop in which I give priority to the wishes of people with a female socialization.

This is not reverse sexism - which doesn't exist (See below for sources and links, I'm happy to provide more upon request).

* I ask you not to judge or discriminate against anyone due to their appearance, age, weight, physical abilities, the color of their skin, or any other attributes. Every BODY is beautiful!

* We live in incredible luxury - sometimes this realization alone can put your own situation into perspective. Gratitude for your own abundance is appropriate. Go for it! Immediately followed by generosity and solidarity with those who may not have the same resources.

Workshops for Adults

* Consent: Please take care of yourself. If you are in contact with another person, please make sure you are also in good and secure contact with yourself. Take responsibility for your own experience, no one else can do that for you. If you aren't enjoying the encounter anymore, you aren't interested in it anymore, or you want to make a change in it for any other reason, communicate that. Give yourself permission to go for what you feel at any moment.

* You aren't obligated to enter an encounter. You can decline offers without explanation or justification in a friendly way (or in your own way). You don't owe anything to anyone.

* At the same time, I would like to remind you of my appeal to set aside your first spontaneous judgments about a situation and open yourself to the experience that lies beyond what you think you know. Trust yourself that you can manage this balancing act. You will do the right thing for yourself.

* Just as you respect your own boundaries, respect those of others. If you are shown a boundary by someone, it is only a boundary. It can open the possibility for you to reorganize yourself. The person showing you the boundary deserves appreciation for their honesty.

Some final advice from me

* Please take care of personal hygiene, clean clothing, and well-kept teeth, hair, and feet. I will also address this directly, because participants often don't feel comfortable mirroring others honestly on these topics. I'm happy to help with subtle, non-discriminatory hygiene advice.

It's my first time of distributing a document like this before a workshop. I have always been against having people sign lengthy protocols before daring to make physical contact. I want to trust impulses and improvisation.

But even intuition needs an informed organism. Besides the "beginner's mind", the emptiness that I invite in, it requires us to be aware of structures and social relationships. Our heads and our guts (and our pussies), our language and our bodies can work together!

I wish for an open, intuitive, warm, and heart-felt play space.

To make it safer for all of us, it needs an investment in consciousness, differentiation - and a leap of faith. From everyone, for everyone! You've already shown your trust in me by registering for the workshop. And now I am giving that back to you.

I'm super excited to be with you!

Warmly,
Marlen

P.S.: If there are questions, additions, comments about this document, please send them to me at mail@marlen.me. There will also be space for them during the workshop. Awareness is a collective evolution. Let's start together!

On the question of whether there can be sexism against men, or racism against white people:

<https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/warum-es-keinen-sexismus-gegen-maenner-oder-rassismus-gegen-weisse-gibt-a-1236954.html>

<https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/sexismus-laesst-sich-nicht-umdrehen>

<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/der-grosse-unterschied-es-gibt-keinen-rassismus-gegen-weisse/25893440.html>

