The Journey Alongside: Ally Development in and For Family Therapy

Lorien S. Jordan[β], Leslie A. Anderson[Ω], Michael G. Curtis[Ω], Nea Krpo[β], Stephanie E. Armes[∞]
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Contact: lsjordan@uark.edu

Questions for Personal Reflection[1]

1. What causes are you involved in or have some interest in?
2. Why would someone in a target group want to work with me, towards this goal?
3. What personal excavation and work must I continually do to understand my privileges, my assumptions and prejudgments, and other potential barriers toward building trust?
4. What work do I need to do to heal the pain I experience when I learn about the role of my social group (and therefor my own role) in the oppression of others as I work to dismantle oppression?
5. What am I willing and able to do to continue to be aware of my tendency to perpetuate the oppressive language, and behaviors of my in-group?
6. Am I willing to listen deeply as individuals of difference speak about the pain and reality of their experiences?
7. How might my participation in solidarity work be experienced as harmful, or a performance by individuals of difference?

Questions for Organizational/Professional Reflection[1]

1. What are the hidden sites of oppression* in the field of family therapy? (sites often hidden from oppressors' perspectives, all too clear to those who experience oppressions)
2. What are my individual and organizational motives for wanting to increase inclusivity and diversity in the field of family therapy?
    a. Are those motives foundational principles to building trust or are they obstacles?
3. What history of involvement does my organization have with the target group?
    a. What obstacles or opportunities does this history present to the relationship?
4. What are the costs to my organization, my community and me if I am not engaged in and committed to an authentic relationship with those different from myself?
5. What characteristics and systems of mutual accountability will need to be a part of this initiative for there to be sustainability of the effort?
6. How are target group members involved in all aspects of the process and empowered to discuss the desire to sustain the effort when the relationship becomes internally or externally difficult?
7. What personal or non-target group characteristics must I examine that can be obstacles to sustainability?
    a. Do I need to be aware of issues related to control? Do I need to be aware of issues related to a well-intentioned "savior mentality"?

Distinctions between ally-ship and solidarity[2]

- Allies 'help' or 'stand up for' those in 'disadvantaged' social positions. In solidarity, we recognize the destructiveness of oppressions to all our collective well-being.
- Allyship is heavy on talk and risks being performative. Solidarity is action, and the work is deep, behind the scenes, possibly anonymous, intentionally consistent and impactful.
- Allies often focus on interpersonal relations; solidarity actions work to dismantle structures.
- To be an ally risks very little (typically the risk is social discomfort). In solidarity, we may risk our safety, jobs, secure place in the social hierarchy, friendships and family relationships.

University of Arkansas [β], University of Georgia[Ω], Seattle Pacific University[∞]

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- Ally work is often done alongside people in subjugated positions, with an emphasis on collaboration that requires participation from the oppressed. Solidarity doesn't require persons in subjugated positions to educate, affirm, or work with us.
- Civility is prized in allyship, conflict may be seen as "counterproductive" or "hurtful". Hard truths, conflict and messy disagreements are a part of solidarity work.
- Ally work generally does not redistribute resources. Solidarity means we intentionally work to redistribute ill-gotten gains.

Work as an ally, or in solidarity[3]

1. Connect your liberation to the liberation of others
2. Listen, listen, listen
3. Remember that everyone in the oppressor group is part of the oppression. No matter how much work you may have done, there is always more to be done
4. Do not work from shame, which can lead to paternalism, saviorism, or disconnection
5. When people point out your oppressive attitudes and language, do not defend yourself, listen, and believe
6. Engage in the process of unlearning oppression with members of your own group. Break the invisibility of privilege, lean on each other to do this work
7. When you hear, see, or experience oppressive language and actions, speak up
8. Do not fall into the trap that you know what is best for another. You can add thoughts and resources, but do not take time and mental space when it is not requested. See number 3
9. Refuse to be the spokesperson. Do not take credit for another's work. Often persons with dominant social identities are asked by others to be the spokesperson for a group by the media, academia, organizations
10. Do not mis-identify with the oppressed group. Dig into your own roots, the oppressive history of the group you belong to is a heavy weight to carry- do not disown it
11. Do not defend your internalized oppressor, acknowledge the hurt that occurs when you discover another aspect of oppression. However, do not look to the oppressed for emotional support, their energy is needed for their own struggle

Nurturing authentic relationships across social identities takes willingness[4]:

… to be challenged
… to *not* be in a place of denial and resistance
… to look first at *myself* when feelings of mad, sad or scared surface
… to remain humble
… to recognize and own my places of privilege
… to avoid "hierarchy of oppression" debates
… to hear the anger of target group members without taking it personally
… to be compassionate and patient with myself and others
… to be an active listener even when I am not ready to hear
… to be grounded in integrity
… to understand the power of language, and the impact of my words and actions rather than my intentions
… to be comfortable with unfinished conversations

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[1] Pinzaña, D. (2003). Authenticity in a community setting: A toll for self-reflection and change. www.alliesforchange.org
[2] Adapted from: Grant, J. (2019, May 30). https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/over-the-ally-9-ways-solidarity-is-an-act-of-radical-self-love/
[3] Adapted from: Bishop, A. (2002). Becoming an ally: Breaking the cycle of oppression. London, UK: Zed Books
[4] Adapted from: Pace, K, & Pinzaña, D. (2003). Qualities of authentic relationships across differences. www.alliesforchange.org