CHAPTER

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Aspiring to be an ally to end men's violence against women and other social injustices: Lessons learned along the journey

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The alarm had been ringing for 10 minutes. It was clear that my daughter was not waking up for school. I bounded up the stairs to try and rouse her. As she smiled in her sleep I said, "Maybe one day you will have a girlfriend or boyfriend who wakes you up in the morning when you need help getting up." She smiled again and rolled over.

I noticed the comfortableness of this remark. The sex and/or gender expression of her future partner did not matter to me, nor if 1 day she would choose someone of a different race, religion, or ethnicity. How did this come about? My commitment to address prejudices and other forms of mistreatment has evolved because of specific lessons learned and reinforced over time in my personal, emotional, and professional life, both in my work and activism to end men's violence against women, and in the context of other social justice issues. More simply, it is the result of a process that has developed and deepened over time, one that is continuing in both intellectual and emotional realms, one that has increased my self-understanding and hopefully allowed me to be a more powerful agent of change for others.

In this afterward to the volume, I review 11 of these lessons. The lessons are summarized in Table 1. I also draw implications from them with the goal of fostering dialogue about what it means to be an "ally" among those who desire a just and equitable world that embraces and affirms all identities, both in general and specifically for men who want to help end men's violence against women.

Lesson One—Acknowledge our own biases

The first and most important lesson is to perceive and acknowledge that we all engage in prejudicial assumptions, thoughts, and actions even when we may have no intention of doing so and may be unaware of their impact. In other words, we can be "unintentional perpetrators" of injustice either explicitly or implicitly: explicitly when we express misinformation and stereotypes about other groups without understanding their significance or potential to hurt; and implicitly when biases cause us to make assumptions about what is right, "normal," or customary. This is true in the context of assumptions about gender and sexual identity as well as in relation to other identities and often occurs in the realm of

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Table 1 Summary of "lessons learned in the journey of an aspiring ally."

Lesson One	Acknowledge and understand your own biases and prejudices
Lesson Two	Seek out and learn from uncomfortable situations
Lesson Three	Recognize that your own growth and freedom is linked to the growth and freedom of others
Lesson Four	Being an ally is a process that unfolds developmentally and one that requires the expression of words in deeds
Lesson Five	Seek out opportunities to listen to individuals from other groups about their experiences
Lesson Six	Recognize and understand the privilege you have in your dominant identities and use this privilege constructively
Lesson Seven	An ally is accountable to the groups they are trying to be an ally to
Lesson Eight	Do your personal healing work
Lesson Nine	Appreciate the strengths that can be born out of adverse experiences
Lesson Ten	Difference is transcended when we can see each other as spiritual beings, but it still "makes a difference" in our daily lives
Lesson Eleven	Practice nonharm and nonviolence as a way of life

victim-blaming when men make biased assumptions about women and others who experience sexual violence.

This understanding was at first incongruent with my self-image, as I had thought of myself as a relatively nonbiased person, but over time it has allowed me to be more compassionate and vigilant with myself when I express prejudices in thought and deed and to be more open to feedback that will help me correct them. This requires vulnerability, a quality that I have worked hard to develop, something which is at variant with the masculine socialization I experienced, but much needed by men in the "profeminist" movement (Berkowitz, 2019).

An example is that when someone makes a reference to a person of authority and their gender is not mentioned, I have noticed that I almost always assume that the person is a man. In this process of awareness and acknowledgment I have learned to seek the advice and perspectives of friends and allies from other groups who feel comfortable sharing and who can point out my biases and mistakes. Over time, this has extended itself to my family and to other close relationships as well as to my becoming a safer person for family and friends to make disclosures to.

I can think of many examples of helpful feedback that has supported my process, as well as of others feeling more comfortable sharing their experiences—feedback that in the past might have made me feel defensive or uncomfortable. One example occurred at a family event when a childhood friend related the upsetting information that her first exposure as a young girl to derogatory language about lesbians was from me. At yet another gathering a cousin shared an experience of her family being robbed in a large urban center, when a man had opened the unlocked door of their car while they were cruising very slowly to look for a parking space. After recounting the story, she said to me: "if you are assuming that he was black, you are wrong, he was white." At that moment I noticed that she was right and that I was in fact mentally picturing a man of color as the thief. These and other incidents remind me that, while I strive to be "part of the solution" I am also "part of the problem." Thus, to rephrase a popular phrase, "in order to be a part of the solution we need to understand how we are part of the problem."

Overcoming defensiveness and being open to feedback offers us the opportunity to put aside unrealistic, idealized self-images and creates the opportunity to learn about our mistakes and biases without feeling guilty for having them or being frozen into inaction by feelings of shame. It has led me to understand that I can be unintentionally racist, homophobic, sexist, Islamophobic, ableist, etc., and may hold other prejudices without awareness of myself having them. A personal challenge for me has been to acknowledge my biases without becoming overly self-critical, ashamed, or feeling that I have failed myself and others. As a result, I have acknowledged a paradox: that it is "normal" and part of the environment that I grew up in to harbor implicit biases about women and other groups, but that these are unacceptable. Thus, even while I strive to lessen these parts of myself, I must also continually strive to see how the culture and environment I live in normalizes multiple forms of prejudice and oppression, including violence against women, people of color, and sexual minorities. Bethea (2021, p. 189) refers to this as a "learner mindset" and states: "Evidence of a learner mindset includes active listening, embracing getting something wrong instead of being defensive, and inviting accountability." In general, I have learned to welcome these revelations as an opportunity for change and as an important part of my journey to become a more complete human being. I have learned that I am and will never be perfect, and that the "quest for perfection" must be replaced by the "quest for wholeness" which in turn requires that we acknowledge the imperfect and less developed aspects of our personalities.

Lesson Two: Notice and embrace uncomfortable situations

The second lesson relates to handling potentially uncomfortable situations involving members of other groups, including situations when I am in the "minority." For example, if I am the only English-only speaker, I can try to overcome my initial discomfort at not being able to understand and participate verbally by embracing the situation as an opportunity to learn what it is like for individuals who do not speak the dominant language. This has also taught me to find other ways to stay connected and attentive to the situation and to develop my ability to participate nonverbally.

With respect to sexual orientation, there were various strategies I used when younger to manage my personal discomfort with LGBTQ issues. For example, I was an avid dancer and in college sought opportunities to go out dancing. The campus gay and lesbian organization were known for hosting great dance parties, but I was nervous about attending. I eventually found the courage to go by inviting a female to come and be my dance partner. Having a heterosexual woman with me offered a form of protection that allowed me to feel safe in this environment and enjoy myself.

At that time in my growing self-awareness, I did not consider whether or not my presence was welcome, or might create discomfort—considerations, which are paramount to me now. Being able to participate in this way in turn allowed me to overcome some of my fears and incorrect assumptions about what it meant for me as a straight male to be there, ultimately leading me to realize that I did not need to devise protections to be comfortable attending similar events in the future. I have also come to understand that the ability to enter spaces where I am a minority is part of the privilege that my identities confer upon me and that the benefits that I receive from doing so entail a parallel responsibility to intervene and speak up when I encounter injustice and oppression, something which I have become more and more comfortable doing over time.

Other important experiences have occurred in situations where I was the only white person, the only man, the only nonindigenous person, the only non-Muslim, or only person who could not speak

the language of the group I was with. In these situations, I have tried to notice any personal discomfort or assumptions that I am unconsciously making about others and to notice how my presence impacts the situation. This is important as well when I enter a women's space that is dedicated to ending men's violence against women, a space in which I must respectfully take a back seat.

As a result of these experiences, I have learned to seek out situations which are unfamiliar or in which I may be the only member of a particular group and to view them as growth opportunities to be embraced rather than as uncomfortable situations to be avoided—an opportunity that to some extent comes from my having privileged identities. This includes soliciting constructive feedback and criticism from women allies with respect to my work in preventing men's violence against women.

Another example of transformed discomfort relating to homophobia came when I was visiting a friend in an area of a large city where there was a noticeable gay population. When walking down the sidewalk I occasionally received smiles and looks from men who I thought were checking me out. At first, I was uncomfortable. Then I realized that I was being complimented. After some reflection, I decided that this discomfort was a result of internalized homophobia, and that there was no reason to be uncomfortable. In turn, I also realized that a compliment about my appearance was a compliment that I was happy to accept. In my work, facilitating rape prevention facilitator trainings and workshops for men, I have noticed that homophobia is never far from the surface and must continually be addressed in context of ending men's violence against women, in order that participants can become conscious of their own homophobia and understand its relation to men's violence against women, to become conscious of how they express it, and to intervene when they see it arising around them.

Discomfort can also occur when I am in a group, and someone expresses prejudices in front of others. My awareness of my own biases (lesson one) has resulted in me being more compassionate and able to respond more effectively when this happens. This in turn has allowed me to be more thoughtful and intentional in developing strategies that are appropriate for intervening in the behavior of others. Much of my professional work has focused on teaching people to not be "passive bystanders" when encountering prejudice and health-risk behaviors (see e.g., Berkowitz, 2016). This includes reflecting on how I respond when men participating in rape prevention programs share rape myths or other beliefs inconsistent with the goals of the program. My strategy is to welcome the remark, thank the person for being honest, and to solicit reactions from other men in the room, which almost always results in a productive discussion that addresses the problematic nature of the remarks. Over time, I have found that there are productive methods of inquiry or of asking for clarification, or of simply replacing a negative comment with positive information about the group or individual referred to that can help others to constructively reflect on their language and behavior.

Lesson Three—Our liberation depends on the liberation of others

A third lesson is that personal growth and liberation in any identity is tied to the liberation and growth of others. In other words, our growth and freedom does not occur in isolation, and we are all interconnected. Once a gay friend asked me to explain my commitment to being an ally. I normally answered this question by affirming my desire for justice and fair treatment for all. But somehow his question was asked in a way that forced me to look within for a deeper answer, and I realized that in fact I was also doing it for myself. This is because in order to be fully human and healthy as a man I require the opportunity to be caring toward other men and to freely express my feelings toward them (i.e., to act

in ways that are not stereotypically masculine). I need the freedom to hug, be physically affectionate and emotionally connected, without reference to my or other men's sexual orientation. His question helped me to see how the homophobia that he experienced as a gay man was also limiting for me as a straight man (although not equally) and that our liberation as men was therefore intertwined, as well as to perceive that anything that undermines hypermasculine attitudes and behaviors is not only important for our own growth, but also to the task of ending men's violence against women.

I have come to a similar understanding with respect to racism, sexism, ableism, religious, and other prejudices. Anything that prevents us from fully accepting and embracing others in all their identities (visible and invisible), directly or indirectly, restricts our ability to be full and complete human beings ourselves. Thus, in a unique way, confronting prejudicial behavior toward others helps contribute to the process of removing self-limiting thoughts and assumptions and is therefore a form of being an ally to oneself.

Harry Brod, the late philosopher of Men's Studies, coined the term "the disadvantages of the advantages of being a man." This insightful way of describing men's experience allows me to acknowledge my privilege while also understanding that my humanity is also diminished by the systems of patriarchy, sexism, etc. and that my work against them serves to enrich and expand my own humanity at the same time.

Lesson Four—Aspiring to be an ally is an active process

Many experiences have contributed to the fourth lesson—that being an ally is a process that develops and continues over time which is only meaningful when we act on the values we hold. To hold a value—such as a belief in social justice—without acting on it is insufficient and ultimately dishonest to oneself and others. This has been called "The Wisdom of Process" (Hemphill, 2021).

When I first started becoming conscious of social justice issues, I saw myself as completely accepting of individuals from targeted groups and as free from problematic behavior. At that moment, I could easily have made the following comment made by a male peer educator about his involvement in antiviolence work:

> I considered myself a "passive objector." I knew women had been oppressed throughout history, but I believed that presently things were pretty even. As far as being homophobic, I had gay friends, but rarely spoke up when I heard gay slurs. I was a non-sexist and non-homophobic male, but I did not believe that it was my place to stand up for either of these issues.
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> **Thayer (2000, p. 1)**

An experience that helped me perceive the naiveté of these assumptions took place early in my career as a Counseling Center Psychologist. One of my first clients was a gay man shared his struggle with the process of coming out. In my own mind, I thought that I was being very tolerant and understanding of his dilemma, in the neutral and nonjudgmental way I had been trained. I was thus surprised to receive feedback from a colleague who knew him that my client had shared doubts about my support and acceptance of his sexual orientation, which in turn served to trigger his insecurities about being gay and undermined our therapeutic work together. With the help of my colleague, I was able to perceive

that my belief in my own tolerance and neutrality had left my client confused about my feelings and had served to activate his internalized homophobia, producing the opposite of what I had intended. I in turn realized that if I wanted to truly fulfill my goal of being a good therapist and provide a healing environment then I would have to be active and clear about my position and commitment to being an ally. I have learned this to be true in all areas of my life and not only professionally.

Values remain unfulfilled unless we act on them. When not expressed in action they lose their purpose and meaning in our lives and can no longer serve as a connection to a deeper internal reality, an inaction which creates a split in ourselves. Thus, men who want to take action to end men's violence against women must find ways to go beyond verbal expression of their support for feminism and to be engaged bystanders who confront other men's sexism. In my work sharing and collaborating with other men antiviolence activists, I have found that one of the biggest challenges that we face is confronting the problematic language and actions of men who we are close to and whose reactions we care about, and that many men harbor guilt in relation to situations where they did not intervene; a guilt that can persist for years or even decades.

These experiences helped me articulate my fourth lesson—that striving to be an ally is an active and conscious process in which we must take responsibility for demonstrating and acting on our convictions—with friends and family, in public situations, in school, and in the workplace. In colloquial terms, "actions speak louder than words" and this requires that we "walk the talk" by translating our attitudes and values into action so that they are in fact meaningful, real, and have integrity, and that we view this as a process that is on-going and that requires continual change and re-examination.

This also requires that we are informed about what is happening around us in social justice movements and activism circles so that we can adapt ourselves to them. For example, my awareness of gender issues remained within the gender binary for most of my life and now part of my inner work has been to embrace more gender fluidity both in myself and to acknowledge and perceive it in others. In this regard, the ally literature has identified the different stages in the developmental process experienced by persons who want to be an ally and through which we grow into acting on values and confronting injustice (Briodo & Reason, 2005).

Lesson Five—Listen to and learn from the stories of others

A fifth way to be a better ally is to seek out and create opportunities where individuals from other groups can have a choice to tell their stories. Hearing the stories and experiences of others has been important and necessary in my education about mistreatment. As an ally I believe that it is my responsibility to seek out and understand the experiences of individuals and groups that I am not a part of. This provides me with information that allows me to further my own growth and be a better ally, to notice prejudicial situations and systems that I might have otherwise overlooked, and to benefit from the insights and wisdom of those with a different perspective. At the same time, this is a complex issue because I do not want to assume that others will want to share. And when the choose to, I feel that it is incumbent on me to listen and believe, as I am being given the privilege of hearing something that is outside of my own experiences and one that may be expressed in a way that is different from my own form of expression. Thus, in striving to end violence against women, I have learned that it is important to hear the stories and affirm the voices of survivors, and to do this in a way that freely affirms their choice to share or be silent, as well as to believe what I am hearing and not judge or interpret.

Hearing the stories of others has taught me about the complexity of identities and to learn that we all have multiple identities with important experiences in each of them. Thus, being an ally requires acknowledging and embracing the complexity of each person and who or what one is trying to be an ally for (i.e., to acknowledge the intersectionality of our experiences) and to be willing to trust in their experiences and perspectives when they do share.

This understanding has affected my behavior in many ways. For example, at professional conferences I have noticed that many participants prefer to choose conference sessions according to which identity group they feel most comfortable with and avoid presentations that they perceive as intended for members of "other" groups. These spaces can be important for those with a marginalized identity who are seeking safe spaces and mutual understanding. However, with respect to individuals with dominant identities, making this self-limiting choice can forfeit a wonderful opportunity for professional and personal development. Some of my most powerful professional learning has occurred at meetings where I was a "fly on the wall." Along with this understanding, I have learned that there are times when it is important for members of a group to have safe times and spaces with each other, something which could be disrupted by my presence, to assess this possibility in advance, to seek advice if I know someone who is there, and to gracefully exit when my presence is not appropriate. The situations in which my presence was welcome—in many cases, as a silent, supportive presence—have been ones when I have received some of my greatest learning, ones in which I have put aside my desire to speak and to be noticed, a problematic behavior described by Leonard and Misumi (2016). It is also important to acknowledge an implicit contradiction in my doing this, which is that my ability to seek out and enter different spaces as a way of learning to undo my privileges is in part a result of my having them. Accepting that some of my identities offer me benefits leads to the next lesson.

Lesson Six—Acknowledge and make constructive use of privilege

A sixth lesson is the importance of understanding the privileges we receive in our dominant identities. For example, occasionally, when I have spoken up in meetings and at conferences colleagues from marginalized groups have made statements to me such as: "I'm glad that you said that, because when I say that no one listens." As a result of these comments, I became aware that I have a voice and privileges as a straight, white European heritage, physically able, "educated" man that others do not have. Similarly, my learning from others about their experiences of oppression has made it obvious that I am not subject to the same mistreatment as they are. I have struggled with how to act on this awareness. These realizations have helped me be more conscious of my personal power (earned and unearned), how I use it, and how it protects and serves me. I now perceive that my experience of having "a voice" is not an experience shared by all, and that I therefore am responsible for how I use this voice so that it does not perpetuate inequality and privilege, but rather, helps to reduce it, to find out what others might want me to say that isn't listened to when they speak, and to be a mouthpiece or amplifier who "gives voice" to what should be, but is not otherwise heard. Knowledge of my everyday unearned privilege has enabled me to be more a more forceful and active agent of change.

I have also experienced a dilemma that others have noticed—that as a male who strives to act against men's violence, I am appreciated and get more credit than women who are doing the same and that it is easy to fall into the trap of wanting to receive this appreciation without seeing that it is distributed

unfairly. As Ijeoma Oluo commented (Oluo, 2020): "Mediocre, highly forgettable white men regularly enter feminist spaces and expect to be centered and rewarded, and they have been."

I try and act on this understanding in several ways. First, I continually remind myself that I may not understand or be able to speak for the experiences of others and I conscientiously remember that I need to listen and learn. I have also developed the ability to use the opportunities provided by my privileges to act against them or call attention to how they may be unearned.

One way to do be an active ally while diminishing my own voice at the same time is to create a forum for individuals from marginalized groups to speak-out. Thus, when I design professional development events, I make sure that all "voices" are heard. I also do this when I serve on committees and discussion groups by soliciting input from members who have not spoken, or by intervening when their comments and contributions are overlooked. When this is successful, participants may give spontaneous "speak-outs" about their experiences of oppression and trauma. In response, I am willing to adjust my agenda to provide time and psychological space for these experiences to be shared and heard. In men's antiviolence work this requires that we create opportunities to hear the experiences of survivors, and to share our work with women to seek feedback and constructive criticism.

A different challenge occurs when I am asked to present to a group of individuals who are different from me. In these situations, I try to acknowledge my biases and unfamiliarity with their experiences, adopt the position of learner who is open and interested in hearing what they have to say about their lives, and to offer what I have to share without assuming that it will be relevant.

At one point in my "aspiring ally process" I became aware of my privilege as a heterosexual and of my unconscious heterosexism. I had felt that I was actively affirmative of LGBTQ issues. But over time I noticed that I was making many assumptions that were based on unacknowledged heterosexual privilege. For example, I did not ask LGBTQ friends if they planned to have a family or get married. Now when I do this, I hear many beautiful stories about these friends' desire to legally formalize their commitment to each other, and to share their lives with children. I had also taken for granted my ability to become a parent, to receive legal recognition of my relationship, and that my partner and family would have access to health insurance and other benefits—without explicitly acknowledging and working to change the fact that others were denied the same opportunity. In short, my view of the world was "hetero-normative" even while I tried to be a "good" ally to LGBTQ individuals.

Some may see these strategies as paternalistic, but I have learned that if I cannot avoid being treated with privilege and being given differential access to resources, then I have a responsibility to use these privileges and the opportunities they offer to illuminate and challenge oppression and to contribute to reshaping public spaces so that they are more inclusive. I have also learned that in some instances I may have knowledge, experiences and skills that will be beneficial to others, but also to not assume that this will necessarily be the case. Thus, while I am aware that it is possible to act in ways that are "paternalistic" and "benevolently prejudicial" without realizing that I am doing so, I have adopted the strategy of trying to notice and inhibit these prejudices and seeking feedback from others while at the same time using my privilege to act against them.

Opportunities to do this occur in daily life where I must assess if it is appropriate to say something and how—including to acknowledge that my possessing dominant identities makes it easier for me to do this. Thus, if a waitperson gives the check to me when I am dining with a woman, I can respectfully ask them if they are assuming that I am the one who will be paying. When a serviceperson directs their attention and conversation to me, ignoring a woman or person of color who is with me, I can re-direct

their attention. This often happens when my wife and I are together, with others talking to and looking at me and not her. Or, if a man who appears Middle Eastern or of color is screened at the airport security and I am not, I can gently ask why he was selected instead of me. If someone who perceives me as knowledgeable asks my opinion about an issue, I can defer the question to someone else who is present. Sometimes the use of humor can diffuse what can otherwise be an awkward moment and still get the point across.

These experiences have generated a heightened awareness of my privileges and increased my commitment to use them to take advantage of and create opportunities to actively interrupt and undermine mistreatment. This includes helping other men become aware of the different privileges that their identities confer on them and how these privileges can be used to positively to consciously support or negatively to unintentionally undermine efforts to end violence against women. The need to use privilege constructively has been brilliantly stated by Bethea (2021): "Seeing a white person who is a learner, who is actively using their status, privilege and knowledge to be present and vocal in countering inequity, is powerful."

Lesson Seven—Accountability to groups we want to an ally to

How can I know if my actions on behalf of another group are helpful or in their interest? While I may sincerely think that what I am doing as an ally is helpful on behalf of an individual or identity group, I cannot know for sure because I have not had the same experiences as others. I cannot assume that "I *am* an ally" but only that "I *desire to be* an ally" and in turn try to find out what would be perceived as helpful. Thus, another characteristic of being an ally is being accountable to the members of the group we want to be an ally to (see e.g., Flood, 2019, Chapter 4). This means that we must seek out their feedback, develop collaborations and coalitions, and most importantly, not assume that we know what is best.

An example from my own career is my work in men-only groups teaching men to take responsibility for ending violence against women (Berkowitz, 1994). Since the workshops I developed were intentionally designed to be men-only there was no opportunity to solicit feedback from women in our community by means of their attending. To address this problem my colleagues and I decided to offer a presentation of the workshop each year that was open to the whole campus community, and to specifically invite women who were active in antiviolence and feminist issues, many who had been doing this work long before men like myself got involved. This provided an opportunity for us to receive valuable feedback about our workshop as well as appreciations for what we were doing, to further improve the workshops, and to engender active support from community members who would have otherwise not known about them. Indeed, I have noticed at times that men's work to end violence against women—in the form of workshop or other activities—is often done without engaging with women activists and seeking their input. I perceive this as a violation of the principle of accountability in which we are accountable to the group that our work is intended to benefit.

It is easy to think of examples of well-meaning individuals who want to help but who may be ineffective or who may do harm. And it is important to acknowledge that one may be relatively successful being an ally in one area but not in others. Thus, accountability to those who we want to be an ally to is an essential component of ally behavior and an important way to ensure that our actions serve to successfully fulfill our intentions.

Lesson Eight—The need for acknowledgment and healing of personal hurts

My activism has led me to notice a contradiction. While I had been outspoken on behalf of other groups at the same time, I was keeping myself closeted as a Jewish person. Rather than claiming my cultural and religious identity and allowing myself to feel pride in it, I left it as something that was unspoken and unacknowledged, even when it was known and obvious to others. Thus, although I had learned to affirm and embrace the traditions of others, I did not make a similar effort to disclose or share my own. By learning about "internalized oppression" in combination with some emotionally powerful workshop experiences, I discovered previously unconscious fears of being public and visible as a Jewish person—individually as well as being a member of a group that was identifiable as Jewish. I then realized that I had internalized these fears from older family members who had grown up in situations where visible expression of their Judaism placed them in dangers that could even be life-threatening. A case in point is that I had not previously understood why it seemed important to my grandfather to find out if a particular friend of mine was Jewish. Later in life, upon learning of his experiences, I understood that for him it was an issue of safety based on his past experiences living in anti-Semitic environments and in the events leading up to the Holocaust, where most of his family was murdered. These unconscious fears were further reinforced by incidents of anti-Semitism that had occurred to me and to others close to me.

One of the personal directions that I have taken as a result is to appropriately present and affirm my Jewishness. Sometimes I do this by using myself and my different identities to illustrate a point in a talk or workshop. On occasion I will teach participants particular Yiddish words (the language of my grandparents) that are emotionally significant and appropriate to the context, but which may not have an English equivalent. In a similar way I have worked to heal the wounds I experienced as a boy and young man who felt "deviant" because he did not fit into the culturally sanctioned forms of masculinity that were promoted as desirable. This encounters with my own fears and internalized oppression has been crucial in allowing me to become a stronger ally and advocate around issues of oppression because it has helped me to understand the experience and dynamics of internalized oppression—and it has also helped me to be a more complete human being. Thus, the need to understand internalized oppression and to heal from hurts that we have received within our different individual identities and experiences is an eighth lesson.

Lesson Nine: Recognize and affirm "adversity strengths"

The next lesson is that the experience of oppression and mistreatment can foster psychological and spiritual strength—without in turn providing a justification for such mistreatment. This refers to what others in the multicultural field have called "adversity strengths" (Constantine & Sue, 2006). For example, a lesbian colleague and her partner had adopted many children that agencies have found challenging to place. I perceived myself as very accepting and supportive of their family and considered them to be perfectly suitable parents. Much later, I realized that through their experiences as lesbians who had learned healthy ways of coping with a marginal and mistreated identity, they had acquired skills that would help them be superior parents of children who also have a marginalized identity—skills that I do not have as a straight person with dominant identities. Another example is that many individuals who I consider to be teachers and mentors have found a deep spirituality and the ability to be effective change agents because of their coping with and transcending experiences of oppression.

My realization of "adversity strengths" has taken me beyond "tolerance" and "acceptance" to appreciate the unique gifts and wisdom that may come to those living on a margin and whose lives have taught them lessons that can be of great benefit to myself. I now actively strive in my personal and professional relationships to identify, appreciate, and learn from the skills, resiliencies and wisdom that can be developed from living with mistreatment and to fight against that mistreatment. In working with men, this requires creating a safe space so that men who experience mistreatment in their other identities can feel safe to share and disclose them. These lessons share a common theme: that being an ally is an existential life issue and not just a professional concern or a matter of "political correctness." They are reflected in the academic literature on allyship, in which many of the characteristics of an ally identified in research mirror those I have identified for myself. These eight characteristics or themes are summarized in a recent article by Carlson, Leek, Casey, Tolman, and Allen (2019):

- constant action of the "everyday ally";
- prioritizing a structural analysis of oppression and privilege;
- nonself-absorbed and accountable self-reflection;
- amplify marginalized voices;
- welcome criticism and be accountable;
- listen + shut up + read;
- ally is not a self-adhesive label; and
- allyship: unlikely or desirable?

The desirable characteristics of a social justice ally are mirrored as well in the personal remarks of a group of African-American women attending the 2002 Annual Meeting of the Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute, who answered the question: "A Man is a Good Ally" in ending violence against women when (Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute, 2002):

- "He understands that women's need to be empowered is not a threat to his strength as a man, but rather an additional strength,
- He listens to women and has a willingness to "call out" other men on their issues,
- He is able to take the direction and leadership in violence prevention work from women,
- He models behavior for his friends and other men by letting others see his example,
- He is not struggling with his own manhood and does not need to prove that he is a man, and
- He is willing to hear women's reality "full out" because he realizes that there are aspects of this reality that he does not know about."

I have come to believe that striving to be an ally and to embody the characteristics listed above is in fact a moral and spiritual necessity. The important life experiences that transform us are often life experiences outside of our personal identities and identity groups. We can learn to seek out such life-changing experiences and make a commitment to providing similar opportunities for others rather than choosing to stay in our (privileged) comfort zones. We can create friendships, professional, and learning environments where people from other identities can give us feedback about our unconscious prejudices, where personal discomfort can be used as a growth edge, and where individuals from mistreated groups can speak about their own experiences in one or multiple identities. To be an active ally requires a commitment to translating values into action by using inclusive language, learning, and teaching skills to interrupt prejudicial behavior, clarify unconscious assumptions, and take personal responsibility for contradicting privilege. Finally, we must make room in our lives to do our own work and healing

in the identities where we have been hurt—in my case, growing up with less economic resources than my peers, as a Jewish person, and as a man uncomfortable with how I was taught to be a man. All of this has led me to the learning of a final lesson.

Lesson Ten—Difference is transcended when we can see each other as spiritual beings

Each of these lessons and experiences point to the tenth realization—that while difference and identity are important and shape our experiences in profound ways, there is something within us that transcends these differences. This leads me to affirm the conclusion of many wisdoms and spiritual traditions that there is something in each of us that is beyond our differences and beyond time, space, and form. In this context, I like to say that "difference does and doesn't make a difference." I believe, considering what I have experienced in my own life and seen in the lives of others, that "difference makes a difference." Yet on a deeper spiritual level I have also learned that all persons share a common humanity as souls on a journey through life. This perspective suggests that we are all embodied beings inhabiting different forms and identities who share unique as well as similar challenges and experiences along our existential and spiritual journeys. Much of what I have learned during my own spiritual search contradicts the ideas of "rugged individualism" and materialism that I inherited growing up in the United States and for this awareness I am indebted to Indigenous, Eastern and Feminist writers and ways of thinking. It is from my believing in a more universal form of our humanity that I can say that "difference doesn't make a difference" while at the same time acknowledging that at the level of form and everyday experiences, that differences have real consequences and "make a difference."

Knowing when difference makes a difference and when it does not is important. To say that difference does not make a difference when it does (i.e., in our everyday lives, choices and opportunities, or, we could say, "horizontally") is empirically and morally wrong and trivializes injustice. However, these differences can be transcended when we consider each other from an existential, spiritual, or "vertical" perspective. Thus, to deny our fundamental existential sameness as humans and as spiritual beings is just as wrong as it is to deny that our identities make a difference and have real consequences in our everyday lives. Thus, one can view life in terms of the both the "vertical" and the "horizontal" and learn to see them as complementary in a "both/and" fashion rather than as mutually exclusive.

Lesson Eleven—Practice nonviolence and nonharm as a way of life

My work on social justice issues has led me to the view that mistreatment of *any* kind is a form of violence. As my understanding of violence in all its forms has grown, I have begun to look at my life differently and expand my concerns and interests beyond the field of social justice and men's antiviolence work as they are customarily defined. I have started to ask myself the question: how do my life choices affect others—including all living creatures on earth and even the earth itself? For example, to what extent do my eating preferences, purchases and way of life result in harm and mistreatment of other living beings? Are there ways that I can meet my needs for food, possessions,

and transportation in ways that are less harmful to the planet? Is it ethical for my partner and I to have "money in the bank," health insurance, and funds for a secure retirement when millions around the globe do not? How can we use the resources in our possession to provide the greatest benefit to all the kingdoms (human, animal, vegetable, and mineral) rather than viewing them as only for our personal benefit?

Expanding our commitment to social justice to include all living beings and our spiritual mother planet earth suggests that we need to ask ourselves these questions. This further re-formulation of being an ally suggests that we can *be an ally to life itself*, in all its forms, and in turn decide to live in a way that is life-affirming rather than life denying. The answer to these questions will undoubtedly take a different form for each person, but we must nonetheless begin by asking them and acting on our answers. I therefore view the task of being an ally to the earth and to supporting its life and evolution as a natural outgrowth of a commitment to social justice and nonviolence toward others.

In summary, internalizing the commitment to be an ally is a life-long learning and healing process that must be actualized in word, thought, and deed. It requires dealing with many complexities that cannot be resolved in an "either/or" fashion, as well as that we commit ourselves to a process of continual self-examination and change. As individuals who want to foster human dignity and equitable treatment of all, we can accept this challenge with the understanding that our personal fate and well-being is intertwined with the fate and well-being of other living beings, and that we all share a common interdependent destiny and spiritual journey on this planet earth that hopefully, will 1 day make us all whole and complete. We can be "allies to ourselves" in becoming whole while at the same time being allies to others in creating a world where they have the freedom to be whole as well.

Authors note

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