

March, 2021

From the Co-chair of the Social Justice Taskforce

I am honored to be a part of the Social Justice Taskforce of NASAP. In the summer of 2020, every organization was making statements about racial and social justice in the US. Many did not move beyond words. However, consistent with Adlerian values, the NASAP Board of Directors listened to the members who said “enough with words, we need movement/ action”. As a result, the social justice task force was established and NASAP 2021 conference theme was selected as ***Social Justice: Community Healing through Movement***. The Board gave the task force possible action ideas. Building on those a process has unfolded before us.

The task is important, the work is enormous and yet we are optimistic and energized. We have an amazing team. Our task force members meet on zoom every other week for one to two hours. Our meetings are somewhat magical; "doing" is not prioritized over "being". We discuss, brainstorm, make lists, generate ideas, and divide tasks...we do. And we share, connect, support, feel supported and experience a sense of belonging. We aim to embody the social justice values and work with the way we operate in our meetings. The world feels more OK and less lonely for a while. As you can guess, taskforce meetings are energizing, encouraging, and life-giving.

In our approach to social justice work, we are using an inside-out approach. We start with the inner work of self-exploration. We explore the interconnections of our identities, privileges, and social immunities. We are open to investigating the vulnerable spots and we are open to learning. This inner work is carried out to the circle of the taskforce. In our meetings, we are doing the imperfect, messy work of exploring, sharing, teaching, learning, and reflecting. Then the circle will be enlarged to the circle of the NASAP community. The inner work of social justice goes hand in hand with the outer work. Adlerians are guided by *gemeinschaftsgefühl*, thus we know that we as Adlerians have so much to offer to the work of social justice. As the taskforce engages in the work, you will continue to see us and hear from us. Be on the lookout for some more communication from us.

I would like to share a brief reflection on my understanding of how Adlerian theory intersects with social justice work. I am a professor of Counseling at Drake University, Des Moines Iowa, a mid-size predominantly white private institution. At NASAP, besides being the co-chair of the Social Justice Taskforce, I serve as the co-chair of the TRT section. In my university, I established and have been facilitating contemplative practices learning community. My scholarship is at the intersection of Adlerian theory/ positive psychology/ mindfulness and social justice/ multicultural counseling.

Individual psychology is my academic and soul home, the theory grounds me in all my work, including teaching, service, and research.

I am an immigrant from Turkey, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, culturally influenced Muslim, spiritual seeker, explorer of the Sufi path and ancient Anatolian spiritual earth-based practices. My pronouns are she/hers. Growing up, I have experienced poverty and middle-class lifestyles. I grew up in urban city centers, blue-collar suburbs, and slums at the outskirts of the city. I did not experience “otherness” in terms of religion and ethnic background but was taught to notice injustices, to make noise and stand tall when needed, and to support others. I also experienced non-belonging and “otherness” at various times in my life. Maybe it is, for this reason, Adlerian theory came naturally to me...the desire to make sure everyone belongs, just as they are, without negotiating or thinking they need to give up something important about themselves to belong. *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, or as *Sicher* says “social consciousness” or “social awareness” is how I find my deeper connection to Adlerian Theory and social justice work. In my country, I am from the dominant religious and ethnic culture, so I experienced all those invisible social immunities and privileges. As an immigrant in this country, I had to learn to redefine myself with limited racial and ethnic categories, eventually arriving at the only available choice of “other”. I have white skin which in this country comes with many privileges. I appear white and yet I do not always experience myself as white. Hence, there are times it gets confusing as there can be a disconnect between how I am perceived and how I experience myself. As an immigrant, at times entering the fog of racial and ethnic hierarchical system of the US is confusing. I am sure I have made many mistakes entering the conversations haphazardly or naively. I let the courage to be imperfect guide me so that I do not give up in the name of being or being perceived as perfect. I am learning, re-learning, questioning, and critically analyzing all the cultural conditioning. As I said, at different times in my life, both in Turkey and here I experienced being the “other”. I know how painful it is to not belong, to be left out, to experience yourself like an unwanted weed in the middle of beautiful flowers. I am drawn to social justice work because I do not want anyone to experience such “otherness” and “nonbelonging”. I cannot think of any other theory than Adlerian theory for social justice work to happen naturally. Social justice happens with *gemeinschaftsgefühl*, at its core, it is the aspiration to create a *gemeinschaftsgefühl* centered community. More clearly, with Dr. Martin Luther King’s words, we can aspire and work towards creating a “beloved community”. That is my dream for NASAP, for the world and the next generation, doing what I need to do and what I can do to build a beloved community where everyone belongs equally.

I am most interested in the intersections of many identities on a global level. Angela Davis says that we cannot separate what is happening in Palestine from what is happening in Ferguson; justice or lack thereof is a global human issue. I am bothered by

empty rhetoric, platitudes, performative actions, and virtue signaling. I am more interested in messy and honest work. As social justice task force members, we are willing to do the messy work, to make mistakes, and to have the courage to be imperfect. Therefore, as a member of NASAP, I am so grateful to the Board for prioritizing movement and action such as establishing the taskforce and selecting the theme for the conference rather than doing the easy thing...sharing empty platitudes.

I am drawn to Adlerian theory because of its depth and breadth of understanding human experience. The theory considers the social context and unlike many other theories, it is not calling what one might consider as healthy responses to oppressive systems as dysfunctional or irrational. The theory does not place the sources of the problems solely within the individual. Rather, the theory understands the person within the context of society. The theory calls for equality, equity, fairness and emphasizes the social context, belonging, connection, phenomenology, social interest, courage, and movement. These are some of the reasons that Adlerian theory is my academic and soul home. And of course, people....my colleagues and friends at NASAP who make me at home far away from home are the main reason I stick around as a member of NASAP.

As an organization, we have some work to do, but we have a strong grounding and such amazing members, so I am optimistic!

During the pandemic, everything takes three times more time and energy. Knowing this, our taskforce operates with the idea of “you do what you can when you can”. First, I want to thank our Adler University interns, La’Teisha Sawyer and Reylla Santos for their contributions and hard work. Also grateful for my co-chair Jess Minckley who provides such insight, reminds me that slowing down is OK, questions are needed and necessary. Jess brings balance to my “on the go, do, do, do lifestyle” and much-needed organization to our work. Also thankful for the task force members; Dr. Kimberly Martin, Anthony Carr, Dr. Rebecca Dickinson, Michell Griffith, Corey Frantz, Bob Saxner, and Elaine Carey for their courage, contributions, support, and hard work. Besides, thankful for the earlier contributions of our members Dr. Seby Sebastian, Robert Rebecca, Jody Malterre, Dr. Erik Mansager, and Dr. Richard Watts. Again, come when you can and do what you can. Members of NASAP you too come if you can, if you have ideas, time, and energy, and do what you can. Let us know if you want to join our work, support our work, have ideas and questions....

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