Aspiring Allyship, Co-Conspiring, Coalition Building – Definitions/Descriptions

Guiding Reflection Questions:
- Is there anything that resonates, reaffirms, or intrigues you about these definitions/descriptors?
- When you think about yourself and who you aspire to be, what do these definitions make you think about your journey through the world?
- Where/how in your life do you currently live out aspiring allyship, co-conspiring, coalition building?
- When have you seen aspiring allyship, co-conspiring, and coalition building lived out most effectively?

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<th>Aspiring Allyship</th>
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| 1. A member of the advantaged group who works to dismantle oppression from which s/he benefits. Aspiring allies are people who recognize their relative and unearned privilege or power they receive from society’s patterns of injustice and take responsibility for changing these patterns. Allies include men who work to end sexism, white people who work to end racism, heterosexual people who work to end heterosexism, able-bodied people who work to end ableism, and so on. adapted from Anne Bishop | **The concept of co-conspirators or accomplices arose as a response to the misuse of the concept of allyship.**

*Indigenous Action* explains:
1. While the exploitation of solidarity and support is nothing new, the commodification and exploitation of allyship is a growing trend in the activism industry.
2. Ally has also become an identity, disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support. The term ally has been rendered ineffective and meaningless.
3. Allies all too often carry romantic notions of oppressed folks they wish to “help.” These are the ally “saviors” who see victims and tokens instead of people.
4. All too often folks show up with an, “I am here to support you!” attitude that they wear like a badge. Ultimately making struggles out to feel like an extracurricular activity that they are getting “ally points” for. Self-asserted allies may even have anti-oppression principles and values as window dressing.

**Allyship has become a hollow label whereas co-conspiring or being an accomplice is a radical, uncomfortable, ongoing action.**

*Mia McKenzie* explains:
1. “Allyship” has become more pointless performance than anything actually useful to marginalized people.
2. Real solidarity doesn’t require an audience to witness what a good “ally” you are                                                                 | “A coalition is an alliance of individuals and/or organizations working together to achieve a common purpose. When this type of alliance forms to address the needs and concerns of a particular community, it is often referred to as a community coalition. While all community coalitions are collaborative efforts by definition, they can vary in numerous ways including purpose, governance, and procedures. Community coalitions often organize around a single issue or event. An example of this would be several advocacy groups that unite to challenge the imminent closing of a local hospital. Other times, a coalition may form with a focus on several concerns. An example of this type of coalition would be a group of concerned community advocates and organizations banding together to improve the overall living conditions in a given neighborhood. To accomplish its broad goal, this coalition may choose to address multiple related issues such as the expanding the community’s access to affordable health care, closing a nearby toxic dump site, |
oppression. –Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, Edited by Adams, Bell, and Griffin.


“Individuals acting as Allies for Social Justice work with those from the oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end the system of oppression.

Allies for Social Justice recognize that members of dominant groups are also harmed by the system of oppression, although the harm done to members of dominant groups is not the same nor comparable to the harm done to subordinate groups (Freire, 1972).

...rather than being allies to an individual, these are allies to issues such as classism, racism, or religious oppression (Kendall, 2006). Allies for social justice also see the interconnectedness of forms of oppression and recognize how limiting it can be to seek strategies addressing one form of oppression in isolation (Bell & Griffin, 1997).

4. Real solidarity isn’t worn like a nametag

Spectra explains:

5. Falling back on words and phrases that are intended to convey some sort of ideological purity won’t ever trump the transformation you’ll experience within yourself (and others) if you truly put yourself out there — if you dare to be vulnerable, admit wrongs, take responsibility for your blind spots, hold your damn self accountable, and not for show, but for real.

Co-conspiring focuses on how people in positions of privilege must recognize that their role is to act in solidarity with people in positions of oppression.

Rose Hackman explains:

1. “The definition of ally-ship is to mutually benefit and support. Black people are not obligated to provide support to people who are dominant,” Jones said. “We are not working together on a mutual goal. My goal is to live. You don’t have that same goal.”

2. “What I need is for people to come and work with us in the trenches and be there alongside us. It’s not about being on the outside and saying ‘yes, I support you!’ It’s about ‘not only do I support you, but I am here with you, I am rolling up my sleeves. What do I need to do?’”

Spectra explains:

3. When someone fights for me, I want them to do so because they care about me as an individual – or as someone who reminds them of someone else that they care about – not just as some abstract theoretical concept. I’d rather that the “white allies”, the “straight allies”, the “male feminists” of the world do the work to build authentic relationships based on real love and respect, not just politically correct lexicon and rhetoric.

Co-conspiring involves action at intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels

improving the local school system, and increasing area housing options. Also, coalitions may be formed as relatively short-lived alliances rather than longer term partnerships. A coalition intended to have a longer lifespan than others will generally require more effort to maintain its organization and structure over time. Still, no matter how many issues it takes on or how long it plans to exist, the success of any successful coalition fundamentally depends upon the dedication and organization of interested advocates and advocacy groups. Ultimately, coalition members must identify their common interests, articulate their shared goals, and work together to take advantage of the benefits that result from being part of a larger collective.


A coalition is a group of organizations that come together for the purpose of gaining more influence and power than the individual organizations can achieve on their own. From a community organizing perspective, the reason to spend time and energy building a coalition is to amass the power necessary to do something you can’t do alone. Coalitions come in a variety of different forms. They can be permanent or temporary, single or multi-issue, geographically defined, limited to certain constituencies (such as a coalition of farm groups), or any combination of the above. How to Work in Coalitions – Western
As a means of monitoring their own unacknowledged oppressive socialization (Harro, 2000), these allies seek to develop systems and structures to hold themselves accountable and he held accountable by members of oppressed groups, without placing the burden for accountability on the oppressed (Kivel, 2002).... [they] connect and take responsibility for working with others from dominant groups, rather than seeking to separate from them, in an effort to bring about justice in the interest of all.”

**Aspiring Social Justice Ally Identity Development: A Conceptual Model by Keith Edwards**

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<td>1. Acknowledging the existence of racism whether or not one is a regular victim of it, to denounce new forms of it, including the use of words “thugs” and “riots” to define black people and their protest, to identify the exclusion of black perspectives in many forms of media and seek them out, to confront anti-black racism within closed circles (including schools, friendship circles and families), and to pledge to participate in the overall black-led fight to end racial injustice.</td>
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<td>2. Accomplices listen with respect for the range of cultural practices and dynamics that exists within various Indigenous communities. Accomplices aren’t motivated by personal guilt or shame, they may have their own agenda but they are explicit. Accomplices are realized through mutual consent and build trust. They don’t just have our backs, they are at our side, or in their own spaces confronting and unsettling colonialism.</td>
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<td>3. Don’t wait around for anyone to proclaim you to be an accomplice, you certainly cannot proclaim it yourself. You just are or you are not. The lines of oppression are already drawn. Direct action is really the best and may be the only way to learn what it is to be an accomplice. We’re in a fight, so be ready for confrontation and consequence.</td>
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**Organization of Resource Councils**

Identifying as a person of color in solidarity with other people of color says ‘hey, my people have been oppressed by White people, maybe in a different time and space than your people, but we can work in solidarity.’ The identification needs to carry some degree of humility, and a deeper commitment to allyship. The POC umbrella is not an excuse to disavow the ways we benefit from various racial structures and sit idly by as our communities reap advantages from racism towards other people of color.

**What’s Wrong With the Term ‘Person of Color’ by Janani on BDG**

‘It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.’ –Audre Lorde, Our Dead Behind Us: Poem