MEDIA REVIEW

■ *Trans Allyship Workbook: Building Skills to Support Trans People in Our Lives*

Davey Shlasko. Madison, WI: Think Again Training, 2017, 101 pp., \$6.00-\$18.00 (paperback), \$1.00-\$12.00 (eBook)

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In 2018, 26 people who were known to be transgender were murdered in the United States (Human Rights Campaign, 2020); the actual number may be higher due to many factors, including family members who do not report their murdered loved ones as transgender, or if the transgender status is unknown. Members of the transgender community face significant social, legal, and medical discrimination, and frequently avoid accessing health care for fear that health-care spaces will be unsafe for them (Grant et al., 2011). The nursing profession is well positioned to provide safe and competent care to transgender individuals; however, with little education dedicated to transgender health, how can nurses be advocates for the transgender community? In *Allyship Workbook: Building Skills to Support Trans People in Our Lives*, author Davey Shlasko contends that the answer is allyship.

Shlasko defines allyship as "... not something you are, nor something you think or feel, but something you do. It is informed, accountable action that contributes to other people's ability to survive and thrive in a context of inequality" (p. 5). Shlasko's book walks the reader through how to be an ally to the transgender community and how to provide competent care and safe spaces for the transgender population. Shlasko, a scholar, teacher, and consultant for nearly 20 years, has written extensively about transgender issues and social justice. *Trans Allyship Workbook: Building Skills to Support Trans People in Our Lives* includes a total of five chapters that define what allyship is, explain transgender identity, share transgender experiences, review standard definitions and concepts related to transgender people, and help readers learn how to put transgender advocacy into action.

In the first chapter, Shlasko establishes Love's (2013) 4 A's of Liberatory Consciousness (awareness,

analysis, action, and accountability) as a call to action for transgender allyship. First, be *aware* of the issues transgender people face in society. Global, national, state, and local news can highlight the disparities and hardships the transgender population faces. Second, perform an *analysis* of transgender issues by "developing a nuanced understanding of what we know and observe . . . requires us to think through why and how those things are happening, what is wrong or right about them, and why it matters" (p. 6). Third, put allyship into *action* by addressing transgender injustice through writing op-ed articles in the newspaper or by advocating for more transgender education topics at the workplace. Fourth, show *accountability* by confronting personal prejudices and assumptions and attempting to change individual worldview with regard to transgender issues.

Weaving the practice of the 4 A's of Liberatory Consciousness throughout the next four chapters, Shlasko discusses crucial concepts needed for useful allyship to the transgender community, and demystifies common misunderstandings related to the definition of gender, gender transitioning, and pronoun use. It is essential to not define gender in traditional binary gender terms, and to recognize that gender is separate from sexual orientation, gender expression, biology, and sex assigned at birth. State and federal laws that use the definition of gender in traditional and binary terms (either male or female based on sex assigned at birth) have adversely affected the transgender community and left them vulnerable to discriminatory practices and treatment (Equality Federation Institute, Freedom for All Americans, National Center for Transgender Equality, & Movement Advancement Project, 2016). Gender transition can occur at any stage of life and in various forms

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of personal, social, legal, physical/medical, and spiritual/religious experiences. These varying forms of transition are not always static, and may or may not occur, depending on the individual. The critical concept to understand is that a transgender person's experience is individual and looks different for everyone. As Shlasko points out, "No one else gets to decide when someone's transition is 'complete' and respecting someone's gender should not depend on how complete their transition seems to you or to them" (p. 21).

Typically, a vital part of transitioning includes using the appropriate pronouns. Appropriate pronoun use can validate and create a welcoming environment for transgender individuals. Non-transgender, or cis-gendered, people may find it challenging, especially when the pronoun someone uses is gender-neutral like "they, them, their" or "ze, zir, zirs." Shlasko recommends the practice of using the person's chosen pronouns, even when they are not present, to make a habit of using the right pronoun.

The concept of allyship is a clear and effective way to address the transphobia that permeates current society. *Trans Allyship Workbook: Building Skills to Support Trans People in Our Lives* demystifies the barriers to transgender care and provides several suggestions on how to navigate unfamiliar knowledge and language. By bringing awareness to the systematic issues transgender people face, Shlasko challenges readers to analyze their own biases and to commit to concrete actions that improve the lives and outcomes of the transgender community. Shlasko gives

specific, practical, straightforward recommendations for health-care providers, educators, and human services professionals. Nurses must move beyond the role of patient advocate for their transgender patients, into the position of ally. Shlasko's book provides an excellent resource for anyone wanting to become an ally or enhance their allyship with the transgender community.

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