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Therapy & Social Justice

Dear prospective clients,

When an individual or someone in a couple or family... in a community or work situation may have a need to get assistance from therapy, sometimes it is important if not critical to **find a therapist who is aware of and touch with social justice issues**. Client needs and challenges including attachment issues, trauma, child abuse, domestic violence, self-esteem, personality disorders, relationship/intimacy problems, and other **therapeutic issues may have nuanced to major or primary relationship to issues of social justice**. This can be from personal, historical, and/or institutionalized discrimination, abuse, or minimization- that is, emotional, psychological, academic, economic, spiritual, to physical violence against black people, other people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized or oppressed communities. Such people do not need therapists who are “colorblind” or sees everyone as an individual, in a way that functionally dismisses or ignores critical experiences. Instead, they need therapists who understands societal and historical consequences of racism, sexism, hetero sexism, classism, ageism and other institutionalized oppression. **Whereas the “colorblind” therapist dismisses or minimizes the impact of these psychic annihilations and stresses, therapists who hold social justice as a foundational perspective that is often relevant – if not critical to the psychological and emotional experiences of people**. Such therapists honor the intersectionality of each and every influence on the emotional and mental health of clients.

This also means that **social justice-oriented therapists may challenge clients’ prejudices, entitlements, and privileges** unconsciously, semi-consciously, and consciously held that might affect their relationships with another person or persons. How they may be affected by others issues is counterbalanced as to how they may hold comparable values and perspectives derived to survive oppression, that may accept and justify their dysfunctional denial of human rights of a child, a woman, or any person in a primary relationship with themselves. Social justice conscious therapists should help everyone recognize how their anxiety, fear, depression, loss, and pain may have been influenced by others consciously or unconsciously held perspectives and values. AND challenge them if they have developed parallel process where they might consciously or unconsciously hold perspectives and values that can lead to projective processes entitling the violation of some other’s civil and human rights. That might mean a partner, spouse, family member or child, or work colleague or other person in the community. Social injustice would be stopped and diverted to positive personal, family, community, national, and global fulfillment.

People who understand and require the intersection of personal health and growth along with social justice and health would need to seek therapists who are not silent if they become self-righteous and/or begin expressing negativity that can lead to entitlement to harm other people – be it family members or others in the community. People who look for deeper broader emotional and psychological health need to be willing to explore the deep psychological, emotional, cultural, family-or-origin and other models of self-esteem, individual and group identity, and empowerment (or lack of) that are **the roots of intrapersonal and interpersonal intimacy and**



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health AND of belonging and alienation in the family, the neighborhood, the community, country, and globally.

*Some people will find this perspective unnecessary or fail to see the relationship between personal well-being, their families, and the greater social and cultural issues of the community, nation, and world. However, I got into social or human services, originally as a teacher and then as a therapist because of deeply caring about social justice. I hope you will see the connections between individual, couples, and family empowerment and your capacity to function in the larger world. Many people are deeply saddened, hurt, and angry about the violence against people of color, misogyny, discrimination and attacks on the LGBTQ community, and others. Violence, whether personal or institutionalized... whether emotional/psychological, societal or economic), or physical and fatal weighs heavily upon the psyche, security, energy, and hope of many people. **Whether an ally or someone who has experienced such discrimination or violence, the result can be anxiety and depression along with stress compromised self-esteem, relationships, and functioning.***

*I am Chinese-American from immigrant parents and married to a Japanese-American woman whose older family members were incarcerated in desert prisons behind barbed wire during WWII for not being somehow American enough- specifically, not white. I grew up in the 60s in the black part of South Berkeley with the civil rights movement all around me. The assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and others are the background of my development. **Social justice is not a new concern** of mine, nor is it an additional minor aspect of my being a therapist and conducting therapy.*

*You may have experienced personally or seen in the larger community dismissal, abuse, and violence. There might have been emotional and psychological violence among family members and between parents. You may have heard or expressed your own emotional distress – perhaps with wishful thoughts of vengeance and fantasy solutions that did not come to reality. This may be the therapy you need to do- **the therapy that involves your personal growth and empowerment and health within the context of the greater social injustice** that exists in our society. Are you looking for therapy that seeks to empower you not just individually, but to be a contributor to a better world for everyone.*

This is what I do... what I believe in. This is the therapist I can be for you.