

The Development of Social Justice Allies During College: A Phenomenological Investigation

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The purpose of this study was to examine how undergraduate students who became social justice allies during college understood their development. Six traditionally-aged, heterosexual, White students, 3 women and 3 men, who first acted as allies while in college were interviewed using an open-ended interview protocol. Critical factors included precollege egalitarian values, gaining information about social justice issues, engagement in meaning-making processes, developing confidence, and the presentation of opportunities to act as social justice allies.

Research on students' attitudes and behaviors regarding social justice issues on college campuses has generally fallen into one of two areas: the prevalence of negative or hostile attitudes and behaviors by members of dominant social groups, or the struggle of members of these targeted groups to end oppression. Only recently, however, have studies appeared that explore how dominant-group students come to develop affirmative attitudes toward issues of diversity or to challenge oppression based on social-group membership (Guthrie & King, 1996; Tatum, 1992, 1994).

College students have long been involved in efforts to develop more just and equitable societies (Keniston, 1973; McAdam, 1986, 1988). Recently, this involvement has been evidenced in students' participation in community service activities as well as efforts to ensure greater racial diversity in the student body and the faculty (Dalton, 1991). However, little attention has been paid to the process whereby students become advocates for social justice issues. Beyond the university, the role of members of dominant social groups in the struggle to end oppression has been documented (Blumberg, 1990; Fogleman, 1994; McAdam,

1986, 1988; Norris, 1962; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Pinkney, 1968; Reed, 1991; Schultz, 1995), particularly in the cases of Gentile rescuers of Jews in the Holocaust and White participants in the civil rights movement. However, the question of how people become social justice allies rarely has been asked.

The purpose of this study was to examine how undergraduate students understood their development into social justice allies during college. Social justice allies are members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership (Hardiman & Jackson, 1982; Washington & Evans, 1991). In this study I examined the development of social justice allies who were working in the areas of racism, sexism, and heterosexism ("the system of advantages bestowed on heterosexuals. . . that assumes that all people are or should be heterosexual, and therefore excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals." [Blumenfeld, 1996, p. 1]).

The term ally entered the student affairs literature base in the early 1990s, occurring most often in reference to heterosexuals working as advocates on lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues (e.g., Washington & Evans, 1991) and White students addressing racism (e.g., Bourassa, 1991). Earlier works, particularly those concerning the role of Whites in ending racism, address the concept of allies without explicitly using the term (e.g., Edwards, 1970; Katz, 1978).

Several different literature bases concern the development of social justice allies, as well as how students change during college. Relevant literature addresses attitudes toward socially targeted groups, models of attitude change, theories of participation in social activism,

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models of the development of altruism, and models of ally development. Also relevant is the literature on why people decline to act on their commitment to issues, and finally, historical studies of people who have worked as social justice allies. Student development literature addresses ways in which students change during college, and the causes of that change.

Certain common themes emerge when these literature bases are examined simultaneously. A consistent theme in the social psychology literature is the power of people to influence each other's attitudes regarding social justice issues. This theme is evident in Herek's (1986) research, which implied that people meet some of their needs for acceptance by expressing attitudes congruent with those of significant others. The research on social adjustment functions, which indicated that one of the functions of attitudes was to facilitate entry to or exit from groups (Frankenberg, 1993; Smith, 1956, as cited in Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), also addresses this theme. Polarization theories (Brauer, Judd & Gliner, 1995; Myers & Bishop, 1970) indicate that contact with others who have similar views leads to greater attitude extremity. Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, and Vaughn (1994) presented data indicating that even hearing strangers condemn racist statements led research participants to condemn racism more strongly. These studies make clear that hearing others, regardless of their significance, condemn unjust words or actions should lead to stronger ally behaviors.

Attitudes conducive to ally work seem to be facilitated not only by contact with like minded others, but also by an individual's higher level of moral reasoning and epistemological development, although these clearly are not necessary (Guthrie & King, 1996). The ability to reason more complexly might allow one to be more aware of the dissonance between the democratic and egalitarian values of our culture and the realities of oppression. Higher levels of moral development also would seem to allow one to critique and act against the norms or even the laws of a society in order to achieve social justice. Likewise, psychosocial development, especially development of mature interpersonal relationships, supports action on social justice

issues (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). That psychosocial development, moral development and epistemological development facilitate the development of social justice allies is congruent with the Krebs and Van Hesteren (1992) model of altruism, which explored the development of social justice allies from an entirely historical context.

The literature exploring participation in social protest (Altbach, 1989; Dauphinais, Barkan & Cohn 1992; Keniston, 1973; Klander-mans & Oegema, 1987; Waldron, Baron, Frese, & Sabini, 1988) and inhibitors of involvement (Gilbert, 1988), as well as McAdam's (1986, 1988) research on high-risk activism, makes clear that having attitudes congruent with the goals of the social justice movements was not sufficient to predict ally behavior. One must also be available (i.e., not have commitments that preclude involvement in activism) and be recruited into the work. These conclusions were echoed by Harro's (1996) Cycle of Liberation, in which both knowledge of oppression as well as contact with others trying to understand their role in fighting oppression were necessary to move one into social justice ally work.

Thus, contact with like-minded others who are involved in such work, as well as biographical availability, is necessary for engagement in social justice work, as is attitudinal agreement. In this way, traditionally aged college students (as compared to other groups) are likely candidates for ally work because they tend to lack some of the constraints that would preclude their involvement.

The paucity of research on social justice allies at the time they are engaged in ally work is startling. Whereas the research on student activism reviewed by Keniston (1973) was done contemporaneously with much of the activism of the late 1960s, the research he documented does not distinguish between ally activism and activism for one's own benefit. Studies of Whites in the civil rights movement (McAdam, 1986, 1988; Pinkney, 1968; Schultz, 1995) and Gentile rescuers during the Holocaust (Fogleman, 1994; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Smolenska & Reykowski, 1992) were almost all done decades after the participants were involved in ally work. This is

uniformly true of ally research in which open-ended questions were asked of the studies' participants.

The specific research questions addressed in this paper are (a) how do students who have become social justice allies during college understand their development as allies, and (b) what in the collegiate environment do they see as impacting their development? These questions are a subset of the research questions from a larger study that also explored these students' understandings of social justice issues, ways in which they acted as allies, challenges to and supports for their development as allies, and their precollege experiences.

METHOD

A research design is dictated by numerous factors, including the nature of the research questions, and the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of the researcher. This study was shaped by my beliefs that people's realities are largely constructed; that is, people's perceptions of their experiences are their realities. I also believe that to work effectively with students, understanding how they perceive the world and their experiences is critical. These beliefs and assumptions are congruent with a phenomenological worldview, the paradigmatic orientation underlying this study.

Setting

One of the tenets of qualitative research is the provision of information on the context in which the research was conducted so that readers may determine for themselves the extent of transferability of the findings to their own environments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants in this study were undergraduate students at the University Park campus of the Pennsylvania State University, a Research I public university. University Park is the flagship campus of the Penn State system, enrolling roughly 40,000 students, of whom approximately 33,000 are undergraduates (The Student Body, 1996). University Park is located in a small town in central Pennsylvania—a very rural, thinly populated, and politically conservative part of

the commonwealth. Although the campus has a notably conservative student body, a vocal minority supports diversity issues. The university's president, who has made his policy on diversity immediately accessible from the university's home page on the World Wide Web, also supports diversity issues. In addition, the university's nondiscrimination policy covers racial and ethnic identity, gender, and sexual orientation.

University-sponsored programming on social justice occurs through student union and residence hall programs, as well as through the efforts of a variety of commissions charged with addressing diversity issues on campus. During the time this study was conducted, funds available to student organizations for programming were restructured so that one third of available funds were dedicated to programs on diversity issues.

Participant Selection

Because this study concerns the experiences of a rare type of student who is difficult to identify, the sample necessarily was purposeful (Patton, 1990). I selected participants on the specific criteria that: (a) they were currently engaged in identifiable ally behaviors, (b) their first ally behaviors occurred during college, and (c) they were current undergraduate students at the University Park campus of Penn State.

I recruited participants from campus organizations that were created for social justice advocacy (e.g., Allies, Men Against Rape, and Amnesty International). Additionally, I used reputational selection and community nomination. These participants were recruited on the suggestion of student affairs professionals who had had opportunity to observe students involved in social justice work (particularly, but not exclusively, resident assistants); on the recommendation of people who were members of student groups representing the concerns of women students, students of color, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual students; and on the recommendation of faculty members whose courses concerned social justice issues. I selected 6 participants who were recommended from multiple sources, who met the eligibility criteria,

and who seemed to be the best exemplars of allies. All students selected agreed to participate in the study.

Participants

The participants selected for this study all identified themselves as White and heterosexual. The 3 women were allies in the areas of racism and heterosexism, and the 3 men did ally work in the areas of racism, heterosexism, and sexism. The participants all were verbally adept and confident and had a great deal of energy and a passion about their work as social justice allies. Two of the participants were members of the University Scholars program, the university-wide honors program, and 2 others were the top 1 or 2 students in their high school classes. Two participants had served as teaching assistants. All were very self-reflective, as evidenced by the level of self-awareness present in their answers to many of the questions, and 4 of the 6 (2 men and 2 women) had kept journals for extended portions of their lives.

Four of the participants had significant leadership experience in high school as class presidents, student athletes, or in other roles. The participants came from widely varying economic backgrounds, from working class to affluent (although all worked at some point during college) and a variety of rural or urban backgrounds; none was religious, and only the 2 Jewish participants maintained any type of religious identification. All were traditionally aged college students, although 1 of the participants had taken a year off after his first year of college. Two participants majored in Political Science, one in Biology, one in Theater, one in Pre-Medicine, and one double majored in Communications and Women's Studies.

Data Collection

Each participant was interviewed twice, each time for approximately 90 minutes. I used an open ended interview guide, although I departed from the guide to ask follow-up questions or to explore unanticipated but relevant issues brought up by the participant. To assess the impact of precollege influences, the first interview began with questions that explored the participants'

lives before they came to college, including their families, religious and school experiences, and any involvement with social activism. These questions were followed by an exploration of the students' experiences since coming to college, both on and off campus. Questions regarding the influence of organizational involvement, religious identification, and the participants' social identities were explored as well. Later questions addressed the participants' experiences with ally work during college. During the second interview I focused on how students saw themselves as having changed as a result of becoming allies, asked them to identify factors that influenced them to become allies, and explored how their identities as members of a dominant social group changed as a result of becoming allies.

Interviews were taped, and verbatim transcripts of the tapes were made for use in the data analysis process. Following each interview, I made notes of my impressions, the participant, and other observations derived from the interview. These notes were incorporated into the data analysis.

Interview transcripts were returned to participants, and they were asked to read the transcripts and write their reactions to what they had said, as well as to clarify or correct any errors in transcription. I met with all participants to review their comments, and to clarify questions that arose as I reviewed the transcripts. The revisions and transcripts from the follow-up interviews were incorporated into the data set. Finally, I met with all participants to review preliminary findings of the study, and to solicit their response to those findings. All participants agreed that the findings were congruent with their understanding of their development as social justice allies.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed standard inductive coding techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Constant comparative and unitization techniques included reading all transcripts for general meaning; unitizing and coding a few initial transcripts; refining the coding system; grouping into categories all passages having the same code; comparing,

contrasting, and noting absences within each category; writing memos about emerging themes and patterns; generating rules for patterns; identifying and interpreting themes; and confirming conclusions, rules, and themes. A qualitative data analysis software program (NUD-IST) was used to manage the interview transcripts, label units, and compare categorized data.

The trustworthiness of the following findings was developed through a variety of strategies that support their credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One expert reviewed the development of the coding process, and the findings as a whole were reviewed by several experts in qualitative research methods, social justice advocacy, and student development. The participants reviewed the findings of the study and agreed that they accurately reflected their experiences. These procedures lend support to claims of credibility and dependability. In this study I used several forms of triangulation to support credibility (Patton, 1990): students of different backgrounds (genders, class years, forms of involvement) participated in the study, and multiple theory and disciplinary bases provided the theoretical frameworks in which the study was designed and the findings analyzed. I kept a log documenting the data collection and analysis processes so that the procedures followed in this study could be followed by other researchers, supporting the confirmability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Transferability is dependent on providing thick description, (i.e., a detailed description of the study's context and participants [Geertz, 1973]), which has been done here through description of the methodology and can be found in the subsequent description of the findings.

RESULTS

All participants entered college attitudinally congruent with the aims of social justice work. Alexa (all names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants) said, "I've always [thought] it's [not] fair that there's so much inequality as far as class and race, and it's always been that I'm really sensitive about it." Additionally, their

views were egalitarian, believing that discrimination was wrong and that all people were fundamentally equal.

Participants described many aspects of their development as allies, but all participants identified three major components that led to their being willing and able to act as allies: increased information on social justice issues, engagement in meaning-making processes, and self-confidence. To move from being willing and able to act as allies, to actually doing so, required external initiation.

Information

The acquisition of information related to diversity and social justice issues was cited as critical by all participants.

Content. Participants' comments about the types of information they gained about diversity and social justice issues fell into nine categories (see Table 1). The most common references included learning about others' perspectives, the benefits of diversity, facts about and the continuing existence of oppression, and the experiences of target group members.

Five of the 6 participants discussed their development of an understanding of other

TABLE 1.
Types of Information Participants' Gained
about Social Justice Issues

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- Impact and continued existence of oppression
 - Experiences of target group members
 - Connections between and common dynamics of different forms of oppression
 - Other people's perspectives on social justice issues
 - Benefits of diversity
 - Own privilege as dominant group members
 - How to act as an ally
 - Existence of other social justice allies and activists
 - Importance of action

perspectives on diversity issues. These other perspectives included both those of other dominant group members and those of target group members. Some of these insights came from hearing others talk about their beliefs and experiences. Learning to take on others' perspectives, and the knowledge that resulted from doing so, was one form of learning about those perspectives. This perspective-taking also served as a form of meaning-making. The other way of learning from others' views came more directly, from listening to their peers discuss diversity issues.

Katarina addressed the learning that came from hearing different perspectives in class discussions, saying:

It's like you just keep going and going and going and absorbing all of this material and there's people to talk about it with. And it's not just you reading these books and being, "Oh!" Other people are reading them too, and they might not agree with you, but at least there's an argument there which lets you explore other facets of it more.

Different perspectives could be gained outside the classroom as well. Matt felt that through having a diverse group of friends, and particularly through travel in other countries, he was able to learn different ways of understanding issues. In discussing what would enable more people to become social justice allies, Matt said, "Just get out and meet people that are doing different kinds of things, people from different backgrounds. That's sort of a critical thing, for me at least."

Another type of information concerned the benefits of diversity and a just society. Although these issues were not discussed at great length by any of the participants, or even by all the participants, the statements they did make were powerful. Katarina stated:

If I don't have to worry about my Black friends' safety—not even friends, but just in general—if [racism and the areas of hatred] disappear, then all of us will advance. It's not like they'll come up and we'll go down or any exchange [like] that.

I just think [that] getting the hate out into the open and exposing it and getting rid of it, that will just make [society] healthier. I don't want to raise kids in the shit that's going on today.

The most common type of information was of the facts and continued existence of oppression. In discussing what they had learned about this category, participants presented a varied set of responses. Their comments generally fell into one of three categories: (a) how the system of oppression operates and continues, (b) the impact of oppression on target group members, and (c) oppression in general.

The category of how the system of oppression operates and continues included references to the dynamics of "the system"; power and privilege; the link between class and other oppressions; that lack of attention leads to increases in oppression; that conflict between target groups serves the dominant system; the dynamics and impact of racism, ethnocentrism, and heterosexism; the social construction of race; the history of oppression; the distortion of history; sexist language; the class system; the bias of the media; the existence of hate groups; sources of inequality; and modern racism.

Learning about the impact of oppression on target group members included awareness of the chilly classroom climate, victim blaming, and violence against women. The general category included references to learning of their peers' lack of knowledge about diversity issues; their peers' racism, sexism, or homophobia (virtually all participants referred to this); the role of allies; an increased awareness of racism; theory; civil rights history; the experiences of people who are lesbian, bisexual, or gay; a general exposure to minority, lesbian, bisexual, and gay issues; and facts and statistics about oppression.

Participants also learned of the specific realities of the lives of particular, real target group members. Speaking of her interactions with a lesbian, Katarina stated:

We hung out a couple of times . . . , and it was an interesting way of hearing about her life and becoming a lesbian or coming out,

because she did the whole boyfriend bit, and she did the whole after-the-boyfriend bit, and then changing her mind. And it was [a] comfortable setting because [we] were openly discussing [these issues], and I could question and [ask], “Well, what was it like to tell your ex-boyfriend that you’re gay?”

Personal interaction with target group members was not the only way the participants gained this type of knowledge, however. Frank spoke about the reading in one of his classes as very informative: “The articles that said, ‘I’m a Black man. This is what I have to put up with.’ ‘I’m a Puerto Rican. I come here and all these stereotypes represent . . .’ Different things like that really made me think.”

Information Sources. Participants derived their information about social justice issues from a variety of sources. Six different sources were evident in the participants’ comments: the classroom, target group members, dominant group peers, residence life, and independent reading. Additionally, 1 participant discussed the influence of travel on his understanding of diversity issues.

Participants gained an overwhelming share of their knowledge of social justice issues from their experiences in the classroom. All cited certain courses, at least two of which were taken by all the students who participated in this study, as particularly influential. These courses included two women’s studies courses, the resident assistant training course, and several sociology classes. Several of the participants had taken most of these courses, particularly the sociology courses. These courses gave the participants information about particular content areas and served as places for participants to develop their confidence about discussing issues of social justice in a fairly supportive atmosphere. Additionally, all courses used a great deal of discussion, which helped the participants transform information to knowledge.

Learning about target group members’ lives happened primarily through contact with target group members. Five of the 6 participants mentioned this type of learning. Contact with

target group members also was an important way of learning the facts of oppression and gaining other perspectives on social justice issues.

In particular, learning about lesbian, bisexual, and gay issues happened primarily outside the classroom. These issues were addressed to some extent in women’s studies and the resident assistant courses, but most participants’ learning about these issues happened through contact with people who were lesbian, bisexual, or gay. Tim discussed the impact of having a close friend who was gay:

[Friend’s name] was really the first friend of mine who I did find out was gay. And I was almost glad because . . . finally . . . someone who I’d been friends with for a long time . . . was part of this group and didn’t meet the stereotype. And . . . I could also say to my other friends, my homophobic friends . . . “I have good friends who are gay. I don’t appreciate you making fun of gay people because . . . you’re offending me by offending them.” That was a powerful influence on me . . . [my girlfriend] and I have gone out on dates with he [sic] and his partner . . . After we went out to dinner together with the couple, my girlfriend and I were holding hands walking down the street but they couldn’t do that. You know, they’d get beat up if they were seen doing that. . . . That just stirred me a lot and really made me realize the importance of fighting for rights for gays, lesbians and bisexuals. So that was a pretty crystallizing moment.

From their dominant-group peers the participants learned that some people still hold blatantly oppressive views. Most participants reacted to these views, saying something to the effect of, “I didn’t think anyone still thought that way!” The participants also learned how little their peers knew of social justice issues. As part of an assignment, Alexa asked in one of her classes:

“How many people here think that there are extremely active White supremacy groups in Pennsylvania?” There were three or four hands. “How many people live in Pennsylvania?” Everybody raised their hand

except me and maybe two other people. [Assuming that all Pennsylvania residents would have known this], so it was just, “OK, we’re not on the same level.” I’m going to just really have to start [slow] because I’m going up against a big battle here, people not really knowing anything.

Both participants who were resident assistants said that the RA (resident assistant) training class was critical, as was contact with other RAs who were concerned with social justice issues, and with professional staff members who were knowledgeable about, and working to address, social justice issues. Alexa said, “It’s just so complex, and that’s why I love having friends [who work]in res[idence] life who do know. I credit coordinators [professional staff members] as close to professors as far as they know [about diversity issues].” Notably absent were any comments by the 4 other participants who were not RAs regarding learning about social justice issues through residence life-sponsored programs.

Virtually all participants mentioned owning many books on social justice issues. Most participants implied that they had read at least some of these books, and that the literature had served as an important additional source of knowledge on social justice issues. The influence of independent reading was critical in 3 of the 6 participants, each of whom mentioned several influential books, although all of the participants discussed the importance of reading they had done on their own, and almost all were very proud of their libraries.

Meaning-Making

The participants spoke simultaneously of gaining information, discussing it, thinking about it, and using it to take the perspective of those speaking. By using these meaning-making strategies, the participants transformed information into knowledge. They used their precollege values and the information they had acquired as the content for these meaning-making processes. Through reflection, discussion, and perspective taking, the participants developed clarity regarding—and confidence in—their own

position on social justice issues. Additionally, meaning-making processes combined with information to give the participants a strong knowledge base regarding social justice issues. Similarly, knowing they had this knowledge base also created confidence in their ability to act as allies. Discussion, self-reflection, and perspective-taking did not necessarily operate independently. Discussion often stimulated perspective-taking and self-reflection. Perspective-taking and self-reflection often interacted in a bidirectional relationship, each stimulating the other.

Discussion. Across and through their comments about the information they had gained and about how they generally had changed in college the participants wove references to the role of discussion. Although some learning occurred individually (e.g., by reading independently) or passively (e.g., through lectures), most of the examples that participants gave of instances of learning or change were in situations where extensive discussion occurred. Participants saw discussion as an important component of developing their understanding of social justice issues and acting as allies. Hearing what others believed and why they believed as they did showed participants what they and did not agree with. It exposed them to different perspectives and experiences, which increased their general knowledge of diversity issues, in particular the experiences of members of targeted social groups.

Discussions happened primarily in two forums: in classes and with peers, both friends and classmates. Class discussions were helpful to the participants in gaining content information and in hearing expressions of racism, which clarified what the participants did not believe and made clear the importance of being vocal in presenting alternate, nonracist perspectives. A few participants did note with disappointment a homogeneity of perspectives on social justice issues in some classes, a reluctance to appear racist or sexist, which limited discussion.

Many of the participants’ peer groups had a wider variety of views on issues of social justice than the participants found in their classes on those topics. Several of the participants had

regular contact with friends who perceived the issues very differently than did the participants. Having dominant group friends with different views was not a negative experience for Lynn, providing her with an opportunity to clarify her own views on social justice issues. She said:

We had uncrossable differences of opinion and I think that's what made it good, because you heard both sides of the argument. And I didn't look at these people and say "What you believe [is] wrong." But at the same time it made me [consider the reasons] why what I thought was right.

Perspective-Taking. In addition to discussion, perspective-taking helped participants clarify their own positions on social justice issues, and translate the information they gained into knowledge. Frank discussed the importance this played in his understanding of diversity issues, saying, "Just try to picture yourself walking around in somebody else's shoes and you [get] a complete[ly] different perspective."

The participants referred to what they learned from thinking about the experience of target group members, and the extent to which they tried to take on the perspective of those members. Perspective-taking was a particularly critical way of learning for Frank, who said, "If you're a straight White male you have a pretty limited perspective. So I started to think, 'Wow, [I] wonder what it would be like to be a Black woman at Penn State? Probably be pretty tough.'" He also commented:

The thing that's made the biggest difference for me, and it's the hardest thing for so many people to do, particularly people who are in an empowered position in society, is to actually try to see [myself] in somebody else's shoes.

Alexa also used perspective-taking as a way to increase her understanding. She said:

I've thought about [lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues] a great deal and I wrote in my journals about what it must feel like to be [lesbian]. And I'd imagined the world as gay and lesbian and then me as a straight person, what that must feel like.

Frank stated that perspective-taking led to changes in the way he thought about social justice issues, the people with whom he interacted, and motivated his work as a social justice ally. Perspective-taking, then, served both as a source of knowledge and as a consequence of knowledge.

Self-Reflection. Lynn discussed the role of information as a stimulus for self-reflection, and the consequences on her understanding of her values and position on social justice issues, saying:

The [RA training] class did a lot to make me think about what it really meant to be a feminist and what it meant to fight for a certain cause or a certain type of people or a certain group of people. . . . [It] spurred me into actually thinking about what I thought instead of what everybody else thought. . . . I think I used all of the classes I took as ammunition, like fuel.

Understanding one's views on social justice issues often involved more than just gaining new information. Self-reflection was evident in many of the ways in which the participants spoke of how they came to understand their own position on social justice issues.

Multiple Methods of Meaning-Making. Participants often used these methods of meaning-making in combination with each other. Hearing others' perspectives, or being challenged by others with different views on social justice issues, could serve as a catalyst for self-reflection. Frank said, "I [had] never sat around with 10 people, all of [whom] were women—but from different backgrounds and belief systems—and listen[ed] to them. And that got me thinking."

Katarina revealed the importance of self-reflection, and its interaction with discussion, when she spoke of conversations she had had with her roommate. She said, "[I would] talk [with her] about, 'Where has this affected my life? Where have I done things that I'm not proud of? And where have different things happened?'"

Participants used self-reflection, perspective-taking, and discussion to transform information into knowledge of social justice issues

and awareness of their own position on these issues. Along with creating a solid knowledge base and more clearly understanding their views, the meaning-making process also engendered self-confidence in their knowledge base and in participants' position on social justice issues. This process was central to their development as social justice allies and was the dominant theme in the participants' interviews. However, knowledge was not in and of itself sufficient for the participants to act as allies.

Self-Confidence

The participants in this study made numerous references to the role of confidence in the development of their ability to act as social justice allies. Confidence took many forms and had a variety of sources. The previous portion of this paper addressed the development of the participants' confidence in, and clarity of, their positions on social justice issues and the development of confidence in their knowledge base. "Self-confidence" is used here specifically to refer to comfort with one's identity and internal loci of worth and approval. Self-confidence was critical in these participants' progress, from their ability to articulate and support their positions on social justice issues to their willingness to act as allies.

Self-confidence came from numerous sources, and all of the participants entered college with a good store of confidence in themselves. As mentioned earlier, most had held roles as student leaders while in high school, but additional self-confidence was required to act as allies. Discussing how he reacted to the racism expressed in his fraternity, Tim said:

It was tough at first—especially being younger, being a freshman or sophomore, looking up to all the people. It's hard to yell at a senior, when I'm a freshman, who's making a racist comment. . . . I can tell them how I feel, but it's hard to feel empowered enough to do that. Not even because of the age difference, just because of the experience difference. If someone [has been] in college for 4 years and here I'm this first-year student, it's tough to do.

But now that I'm a little bit older it's become easier.

Self-confidence also had an impact on the meaning-making process with respect to one particular type of information: privilege. Although only 1 participant discussed the issue explicitly, most of the other participants alluded to the same issues. Without confidence in themselves, the participants were unwilling or unable to consider that their success was due in part to their dominant status in society, and the privilege they thereby incurred. Frank said:

I think that confidence was also something that helped me look at other things in my life. It's difficult for a lot of people . . . who are in dominant or majority position[s] to realize and accept that they're in those positions and that they derive some form of privilege from that. And I don't think you could do that unless you still felt good about yourself, that you could take that kind of demotion . . . and say, "Well, I'm this fortunate."

What links these experiences is that they allowed the participants to withstand threats to their self-esteem, to their self-worth, to their physical safety, and to their identities. The ability to withstand these threats was perceived by the participants as necessary to their engagement in ally work.

These participants entered college with well-developed levels of self-confidence. Experiences in college helped them clarify their identities, which augmented their self-confidence. Becoming known and developing status also helped 1 participant gain self-confidence. In addition to enabling them to be less dependent on peer approval, a sense of self-confidence helped the participants to accept that they benefited from their dominant social identities.

Recruitment

In these participants, the confluence of values, knowledge, and confidence appeared to create a willingness and ability to act as allies. However, participants indicated that their initial involvement in ally behavior was not self-initiated.

Rather, they were drawn into this work either through recruitment, or by being in a position or role where ally behavior was expected of them. Most participants characterized these opportunities as random, or lucky events, rather than as opportunities they themselves sought out.

Tim stated, "Getting involved with the *Collegian* [the campus paper] was just sort of a random, lucky time thing." His involvement with the *Collegian*, which was where he learned the importance of activism, arose because the application process for that activity occurred before that of several other organizations in which he had been interested.

Alexa and Lynn did not become RAs because of their commitment to social justice issues. However, because of the RA training process and the ethos in the residence life department, they were able to use their role to develop their skills as allies, which they then translated into other areas of their lives. Matt's first two ally actions were participating in a gay pride parade and writing a letter to the campus paper. His attendance at the gay pride rally was part of his job, an internship which was not immediately related to his interest in social justice issues. Matt was recruited into writing the letter by other people who were interested in the issue.

What ties together these initial ally actions and precursors to ally behaviors is that they were not actions initiated by the participants with the specific intention of acting as allies. Their initial ally behaviors arose from recruitment into an action, or for different reasons that led to a position where ally behavior was fostered or expected.

Katarina is the notable exception to this pattern in that her first ally actions, speaking up about race issues in her women's studies classes, were self-initiated. However, much of her ally behavior was conducted in her role as a teaching assistant. This exception may be the result of an ability to translate her precollege activism in the areas of feminist and class issues, areas in which she is a target group member, into work on race and lesbian, bisexual, and gay issues. A more detailed discussion of challenges to acting as an ally and the supports that students found for their

actions can be found elsewhere (Broido, 1997). However, acting as an ally was not entirely unproblematic for these participants, and they encountered both internal struggles and external challenges.

A schematic representation of students' development as social justice allies, representing only the most significant influences and outcomes, can be found in Figure 1.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest implications for how a university might foster the development of social justice allies. Of course, these strategies are derived from a sample who entered college with attitudes congruent with the aims of social justice work; therefore, generalizing beyond these individual participants must be done with care.

Enhancing Student Learning

A university can foster the development of social justice allies in a number of ways. As experienced and described by these participants, their development as allies was predominantly a learning process: a combination of acquisition of new information, engagement in meaning-making, and growth of self-knowledge. These participants' development as allies exemplifies the integration of both in- and out- of-class learning, of learning to interpret and think about learning, and discussing learning. All members of the university can take responsibility for encouraging students' engagement in meaning-making processes. The environment almost always provides content that administrators and faculty can use as a basis for discussion, to ask students to consider the perspective of others, or to reflect upon their own ideas.

Participants identified the process of clarifying for themselves their own beliefs and values around social justice issues as an important element in their development as allies. Creating opportunities for students to clarify their own values, and to learn to articulate these values to themselves and to others, is a strategy which can be shared across campus units. Values clarification can be part of both curricular and out-



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FIGURE 1. A schematic representation of college students' development as social justice allies. Ally development begins in precollege attitudes (left), grows through experiences in college (center), and results in an ability and willingness to act as an ally (right). From there chance and recruitment are necessary for first ally behavior (lower right), which leads to subsequent ally behavior, although difficulties can impede both initial and subsequent ally actions.



of -class experiences.

Participants cited learning about the experiences of individual target group members as critical to their development. This sometimes occurred through reading, but more often the participants reported that this occurred through contact with target group members. This finding is in concordance with Baxter Magolda's (1992) report that discussion with diverse others was noted by students as the source of their growing acceptance of those who were different from themselves. Although Baxter Magolda placed this responsibility within student affairs, faculty also can and should provide the support necessary for students to come to understand other perspectives.

The participants cited contact with "out" lesbian, bisexual or gay people as critical to their ability to become allies around those issues. Developing a campus climate that is safer for lesbian, bisexual and gay students to come out would likely increase the number of out students, staff, and faculty, and thereby increase the likelihood that potential allies would come into contact with them.

Universities might increase opportunities for target group members to discuss their experiences with potential allies, and provide support for both target group members and dominant group members through the experiences. This could occur both in classroom settings, and in student leadership forums, residence halls, and other informal locations.

One way of gaining new perspectives, and a strategy that was strongly advocated by 1 of the study participants, was international travel. Universities can encourage students in several ways to study abroad, including facilitating the transfer of credits from foreign universities, providing forms of financial aid targeted at students who are studying out of the country, and publicizing study-abroad programs.

All members of the university can work to foster the confidence of students, which may facilitate their ability to challenge social norms and become advocates for their beliefs. As discussed earlier, decreased needs for peer approval and increased comfort with one's own identity may lead to students placing greater

emphasis on the value-based components of their attitudes. Participants in this study identified several different types of confidence as important in their development as allies and noted that confidence made it easier for them to become and to act as allies.

Student Affairs

Even though the participants in this study reported that the classroom was an important source of learning about others' perspectives and reflecting on their learning, out-of-class experiences were also critical. These experiences generally occurred independently of any formal university intervention or supervision. These participants found enough support in their experiences to be open to the contradiction inherent in learning new perspectives. The participants credited their self-confidence as enabling them to be open to different perspectives. If the university can help stimulate students' self-confidence, then students may be able to provide their own support as they face contradictions.

Notably absent from the discussion of the participants in this study were mentions of interactions with student affairs practitioners (with the exception of interactions between the participants who were RAs and residence life professionals). Nevertheless, activities traditionally within the domain of student affairs administration, the residence halls, and student organizations, were where participants carried out their ally work.

Student affairs professionals may foster the development of social justice allies by working to strengthen students' self-confidence and by making information more readily accessible on how to act as allies, including both political strategies (e.g., how to start an organization, organize a rally, petition drive, etc.) and interpersonal strategies (i.e., how to confront a racist joke, what men can do to stop rape, etc.) One participant suggested that the university develop an activists' handbook. Additionally, student affairs practitioners can formally (through active and passive programming) and informally engage students in discussion of social justice issues, and encourage self-reflection and per-

spective-taking. As reported by the participants in this study, these methods of meaning-making were critical in their development as allies.

Social justice issues are commonly part of resident assistant training, and the RAs in this study highlighted the importance of training in their development as allies. Ongoing staff development that provides content information, stimulates discussion, self-reflection, and perspective-taking, and encourages RAs to act as allies and provides support for RAs' actions would augment their ally behaviors.

Faculty

The findings of this study clearly indicate the importance of the academic experience in students' development as social justice allies, both as a source of content information and as a way to translate that information into knowledge through meaning-making processes. More courses should be developed that focus on the dynamics of oppression and on the lived experiences of members of targeted social groups. Faculty should be supported in the development of those classes. Given the absence of lesbian, bisexual, and gay issues in the classroom, as discussed by the participants in this study, greater integration of information on those issues into more classes is needed.

Activities that foster meaning-making processes—discussion, self-reflection, and perspective-taking—are natural parts of good teaching and should be integrated into as many and as broad a variety of courses as possible, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Faculty can encourage perspective-taking by using simulations and creative writing exercises. Self reflection can grow from having students keep journals.

In addition to encouraging meaning-making, courses can “pull” students into ally work. This can be done by providing students with information about opportunities to engage in social justice activism, by exploring strategies for acting as allies, and by encouraging students to identify and then take their own next step on social justice issues they care about. By letting students choose the issue they wish to address, faculty can avoid being seen as forcing students to adopt a

particular political perspective. Similarly, framing social justice work as part of responsible citizenship, or connecting it to other forms of service learning, can make the process seem less politically charged.

As with most qualitative research, these findings are peculiar to the 6 participants, and to the context in which the research was conducted, and transfer of these findings to other situations must be done with care. The extent to which this model is effective in promoting understanding of other students' development as allies is a critical question. Other questions that may guide future research include:

1. Do some students become social justice allies during college who did not enter college with ally attitudes? If so, how do they understand their development as allies?
2. What is happening in the classes that these participants identified as critical to their development? Do these classes have more differential effects for those who enter with ally attitudes than for those who do not?
3. How will these participants understand their development as allies, and the role college played in that development, in the future?
4. Is the development of social justice allies a special case of the development of social justice activism, or a largely different process?

One possible limitation to this research is the ability of the participants to reflect accurately upon their own development. As undergraduate students, these participants' ways of understanding their worlds were rapidly shifting (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hardiman & Jackson, 1982; King & Kitchener, 1994). Some participants may not yet have developed the skills or self-awareness to reflect articulately and fully upon their own experiences or upon their development. The fourth research question listed above addresses this issue.

This research is an initial attempt to describe the development of social justice allies in college. The students who participated in this study provided insight not only into how social justice

activists develop, but also into the special case of the development of allies. Although their experiences are unique to the context in which this study took place, their existence is a testament to the potential for education, and for college in particular, to promote the creation of a more equitable society.

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