

Charity Stutzman
CSA 562, Lundberg
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Reading #3, Ally Development

The point of entry into social and racial justice for students is varied. As a number of articles found, the university classroom is particularly influential, whether that is in the curriculum or the ideologies of the professors. Depending on the campus culture, students may feel the social pressure of joining a cause and being socially active. Yet time and again students abandon their cause. From my personal experience and observations of students and adults post-college, I find that the complexities and difficulties found in social and racial injustice weigh heavy on hearts and minds.

Often times the struggle, which Byrant (2008) describes as feeling God as distant or nonexistent, is due to the challenge of faith and religion. Moreover, students are challenged by social injustice, acts of racism or sexism imbedded in society and white Christian privilege. It begins to attack the church and religion, and due to developmental stages of students, their spirituality and faith. Though the challenge becomes a possible point of entry for students to engage in their faith and social justice, unfortunately many run from the challenge, see it as not important to their own life and completely shut down.

Supporting students during conflict and challenge is an important role staff and faculty play in development. Self-confidence is found to be a direct factor in social justice ally development (Broido, 2000). The question now becomes how do we encourage students to voice their frustration when exposed to injustice. How do

we encourage students to really own issues of social and racial justice? Providing opportunities for peer support and discussion is important, as well as opportunities to lead. When students step in and are asked to lead a cause, they begin to feel confident of their voice. Secondly, supporting students spiritually is important. This doesn't mean imposing your values, morals or even religious practices upon them, but rather fostering an environment where spiritual discourse and thought is allowed. It is imperative that we provide students with varied and diverse resources on religious practices and ideologies, ultimately offering a skill set to critically think about how their own life and spirituality intersect with social and racial justices.

Students are more accepting of other religions and spirituality when they have experienced personal struggles and challenges in their own faith (Bryant, 2008). As student affairs professionals this finding should excite us. We should be helping students gain a diverse global perspective. Furthermore individual students regardless of gender, religion, race or culture should feel valued and accepted by their campus.

Lastly it is this very challenge of the norm, whether social, religious, or political that I find my own faith and spirituality. The account of Jesus Christ and the early Christian church (and my personal interpretation of that), stand as a reminder of listening to, eating with and engaging with those who feel less than and marginalized. This worldview directly influences my response to students who need both challenge and support.