

## **Approaches to Diversity in Educating for LGBTQ-friendly Changes in a University**

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### **Abstract**

In this case study, I examined the approaches to education used in various organizational contexts by LGBTQ activists seeking domestic partner benefits within a major state university system throughout a nearly 20-year effort. Diversity education by activists occurred through self-censoring behaviors, varying degrees of coalition building, and the regular use of testimonials. I considered these efforts through the lens of five approaches to diversity, which illuminated the complex, multifaceted tactics utilized in various phases and contexts of the 20-year effort. Activists primarily used Identity-aware Approaches and Harmonious Diversity Approaches. The article provides insight into the influence of identity, *ressentiment*, and inter-group coalitions in seeking these policy changes. In particular, the study provides researchers, activists, and other practitioners with evidence demonstrating the successful use of different approaches to diversity. These flexible approaches were used in response to varying organizational contexts throughout this long-term organization change effort. Despite the tension that arose among activists determining which approach to use, the deliberative and flexible use of these approaches resulted in a well-respected and generally successful effort.

*Keywords:* policy change, diversity education, organization change

Within universities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals have used education in order to seek equitable policies and improve campus climates. As campus LGBTQ activism gained traction in the 1980s, activists focused on improving basic conditions and attaining policy changes such as non-discrimination and harassment statements that included sexual orientation as a protected category (D'Augelli, 1989; Rhoads, 1998; Spielman & Winfeld, 1996). These baseline issues were the top priority as many LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty faced unsafe conditions. As these baseline policy issues were addressed, activists examined other areas in which workplace inequity existed. Widespread consensus emerged that heterosexuals received additional compensation because their partners (spouses) were included in their employer's benefits plans, while same-sex partners were excluded from such benefits (Raeburn, 2004a). Across the country, employees in all types of organizations began seeking domestic partner benefits (DPBs) to mirror the benefits received by married couples (Raeburn, 2004a) (e.g., insurance coverage, bereavement leave if partner or partner's family member dies, leaves of absences to care for partner, providing step children the same benefits in married families and domestic partnership families). DPBs have become a

minimal expectation of employers that claim to have LGBTQ-friendly work environments (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2009).

Other studies have examined the issues surrounding LGBTQ workers seeking organizational changes (e.g., Colgan, Creegan, McKearney, & Wright, 2006; Colgan & Ledwith, 2000; Raeburn, 2004a; Scully & Segal, 2002; Taylor & Raeburn, 1995). However, gaps remain in understanding which approaches to education are most effective for attaining DPBs. Both education efforts and approaches to diversity take different forms, depending upon the culture, context, and actors in the organization. When seeking changes that are perceived to be of interest to “narrow” groups with a shared identity (e.g., LGBTQ individuals, African Americans, deaf individuals), backlash often results (Hill, 2009). Opponents sometimes accuse activists of self-interested narrowness or “wallowing” in self-pity (Bramen, 2002). Although these critiques are often ways of expressing opposition or discomfort with the topic or issue, such tactics can be effective in hampering the goals of education and activism (Bramen, 2002). Activists, scholars, educators, and professionals need an understanding of how positive social changes can be attained through education efforts. To achieve that purpose, I sought to understand the *approaches to diversity education to attain organization change* used by LGBTQ activists seeking DPBs within a three-campus state university system. Put another way, the study seeks to answer the question, “What approaches to diversity education were used in various organizational contexts to attain DPBs within this university system?” In this article, I provide an overview of the literature on education at work and LGBTQ issues, provide a conceptual lens for approaching diversity, outline the case narrative, and expand on the themes that emerged from the case study.

### **Education at Work on LGBTQ Issues**

A variety of scholars advocate using adult and work-based education for purposes larger than instrumental professional advancement or enhancing organizational effectiveness (Glowacki-Dudka & Helvie-Mason, 2004; Stein, 2006). Hill (1996) explained that the concept of “fugitive knowledge” is used by LGBTQ people to generate knowledge which is geared toward social change. Fugitive knowledge is knowledge that arises in locations outside the control of those who normally police acceptable discourse. This knowledge spreads through social networks and activism, leading to resistance of heteronormativity and ultimately to public action and social change. Although most documented examples of LGBTQ popular education efforts have occurred in community-based groups, this form of education can also take place in workplaces.

Grace and Hill (2004) advocated an integration of queer ideas into education of adults in order to resist heteronormativity and build more LGBTQ-friendly cultures. “Queer,” serves “as an umbrella term for the indeterminate array of identities and differences that characterize persons in relation to sex, sexuality, gender, desire, and expression” (Grace and Hill, p. 167). On the macro level, education efforts can explore and expose *structures* that perpetuate heteronormativity. At the micro level, adult education actively works to counter anti-queer perspectives. Queer ideas can also help in facilitating participatory processes in which learning is integrated into critical analysis. Finally, they argue that queer praxis can result in personal learning and development, which can lead to transformation of the culture through reflection and collective action.

When considering how these concepts apply to LGBTQ employee groups, there are varying levels of intensity at which they can be applied (Rocco, Landorf, & Delgado, 2009).

Brookfield (2000) explained that the spectrum ranges from (a) changing the status quo by developing new paradigms for solving problems, to (b) challenging an organization's way of doing business (with an inherent critique of capitalism as we know it), to (c) calling for an overthrow of the whole system (e.g., develop alternatives to current forms of capitalism). All three approaches occur in university workplaces. However, the first two approaches are more commonly used for attaining shorter-term goals.

### **Approaches to Diversity**

When activists work to bring changes through education, their conceptual approach to diversity influences the way in which the education looks. The term "diversity" is contested and definitions vary. I explore five common approaches to viewing diversity, which are raised throughout the literature on difference and diversity, LGBT theory, queer theory, and theories of resistance. These five approaches describe the prevalent ways in which diversity is approached by both majority and minority populations within organizations. This classification scheme was developed by me, based on an analysis of the empirical, conceptual, and theoretical literature on the topic. Renn (2010) explains that most past LGBTQ research in higher education contexts has utilized psychology, sociology, and modern theoretical frameworks and has rarely used postmodern queer theory. The framework used in this study includes modern and postmodern approaches. I analyze the education efforts to attain DPBs using this general framework, shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Approaches to Viewing Diversity*

Approach	Description	Goals of Diversity Education
Melting Pot Approaches	Minimizes differences in favor of blending cultures or, more typically, assimilating to the dominant culture	Avoid nondiscrimination and harassment
Harmonious Diversity	Understand differences using a "tossed salad" metaphor; minimize dissonance in favor of productivity, approval, or legal compliance	Bias reduction, harmony, creativity, productivity, approval
Identity-aware Approaches	Members of certain social groups organize around their shared experiences of injustice and seek to create change	Creating awareness of injustice, personal and organizational changes, enlisting others to join in seeking social changes
Identity-critique Approaches	Avoids creating guilt in members of the majority and instead seeks broad changes than move beyond issues of interest to particular identity groups	Seeks desires, wants, and dreams among disparate groups
Identity-Influenced Coalitional Approaches	Maintains the importance of identity for social organizing, but avoids transferring guilt to the majority, instead seeking the majority and other minority groups to seek change through broad coalitions	Little focus on personal development of members of the majority, primarily focused on coalition action

## **Melting Pot Approaches**

In some organizational cultures, people from various backgrounds are valued, but *difference* is feared or minimized (Carr-Ruffino, 1996). Groups deviating from the dominant culture are expected to amalgamate or “blend in” due the need for homogenization (Nemetz & Christensen, 1996). The melting pot metaphor was popularized in the U.S. during the pre-World War I era, as an aspirational vision of America taking multiple cultures, blending them, and producing one unified American culture (Hirschman, 1983).

Several critiques exist for the Melting Pot perspective. First, it fails to recognize the persistent group differences that affect attitudes, behaviors, and social consciousness (Hirschman, 1983). In other words, some real group differences continue despite attempts to blend cultures. Second, while such a perspective allows individuals to make contributions to the larger culture, individuals lose too much of their own cultural identities, which contribute to the vitality and creativity of organizations. Third and most significant, the melting pot has often been operationalized as assimilation to the dominant culture (e.g., white Anglo) rather than amalgamation, which is a blending of cultures (Hirschman, 1983). Although amalgamation and assimilation are separate approaches to diversity (Ferdman & Brody, 1996), they will be combined in this paper due to their practical overlaps. In practice, the melting pot metaphor usually means heavy assimilation with very little amalgamation. Education about diversity issues under such approaches primarily aims to avoid nondiscrimination and harassment of individuals who belong to minority groups rather than considering proactive ways of utilizing and combining multiple cultures.

## **Harmonious Diversity**

In an increasing number of organizations addressing diversity issues, the goal is to understand differences and exist harmoniously. With these approaches, organizations move beyond the imperfect “melting pot” metaphor and operate under the “tossed salad” metaphor, which allows for differences to exist without assimilation (Davis, 1996). This type of multicultural perspective recognizes real differences, but minimizes dissonance in favor of productivity, approval, and legal compliance (e.g., Nemetz & Christensen, 1996). Proponents of this approach conclude that we should avoid confusion, vulnerability, or anger, but instead should strive toward bias reduction, harmony, inclusion, legal compliance, creativity, productivity, and approval. Harmonious Diversity educational approaches recognize differences that exist, but emphasize teaching members of the majority to understand and cooperate with individuals from other groups.

Opponents of Harmonious Diversity contend that while this approach might someday be realistic, recognition of differences is not enough in most current situations due to the real prejudice and bias that persists through individual, institutional, and structural discrimination (Pincus, 2000). They argue that some discomfort is necessary in order for members of the majority to understand that changes need to be made.

## **Identity-aware Approaches**

Identity politics originates from the shared experiences of injustice by members of certain social groups (Heyes, 2002, para. 1) as group members seek to bring changes. Much of the social progress in this country has been attained through identity politics (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Gamson, 1995). Many activists and scholars contend that a collective approach to identity is necessary in our current context because “interest-group politics...is...how the American

sociopolitical environment is structured” (Gamson, 1995, p. 400). Within workplaces, identity approaches have manifested both internally and externally to bring changes to discrimination policies, employment practices, and benefits offerings. Identity approaches have been criticized due to the emphasis on issues of concern to specific groups rather than issues that are perceived as being broader and more universal (Alexander, 1999; Gamson, 1995; Sedgwick, 1990). Such approaches can become divisive, sometimes fail to recognize common concerns among marginalized groups, and can externalize problems rather than seeking to overcome barriers (Brown, 1996).

Using diversity education approaches that integrate identity means creating awareness of the injustices shared by members of certain groups. Through such efforts, stakeholders are encouraged to enact and encourage both personal and organizational changes. This change is achieved when organizational members understand the effects of injustices, empathize with members of identity groups, and support and actively work toward achieving changes.

### **Identity-critique Approaches**

Universities and other environments sometimes use Identity-aware Education Approaches that result in members of the majority feeling guilty for the injustices that have been committed (Brown, 1996). As a result, Brown called for a different approach, which I label “Identity-critique Approaches.” She explained that the guilt produced with Identity-aware Approaches can be understood through the concept of *ressentiment* in which a member of a minority group externalizes problems and seeks to transfer problems to others. This process results in an individualistic investment in one’s own subjugation, which fails to critique the societal structure that created this need for a focus on individual needs. In other words, this need for individuals to transfer individual problems to others has resulted from other societal issues beyond sexuality, race, religion, gender, or disability. For example, Dillard (2001) uses the concept of *ressentiment* to explain the “status identity” (p. 143) of religious conservatives, who perceive they have been left behind because of secularization of the country. Instead, she contends they have been marginalized due to lower income, education, and occupational status.

When considering diversity education under conditions of guilt and *ressentiment*, it is possible to slide into the tendency to focus on individual development for members of the majority. Majority members are put into a self-righteous position that can result in minorities continuously doing the educating and members of the majority seeking to redeem themselves for reasons of personal development (Ellsworth, 1989).

Diversity education using Identity-critique Approaches includes having conversations and building coalitions in which *action* is taken among individuals who have multiple interests (Brown, 1996). Such approaches seek to move beyond a self-interested focus and toward more expansive and inclusive approaches that are broadly inclusive in bringing positive action and change. Bramen (2002) contended that this approach minimizes specific identities and differences in its desire to transcend particularity. Through using this approach, coalitional work would focus little on individual group injustices and instead would involve education around common needs that directly seeks change.

When applied to LGBTQ activism, this approach would embrace queer theory/politics. Queer politics sometimes advocates minimal use of labels surrounding sexual behavior, since such labels tend to create separate and distinct identities for those engaging in non-normative practices (Cohen, 2005; Foucault, 1978). The concept of “sexual identity” is therefore replaced

with the concept of “sexuality,” due to its fluid nature. This approach would focus on seeking the needs and wants of various people, while minimizing the salience of distinct identities.

### **Identity-Influenced Coalitional Approaches**

Approaches to diversity that adopt an Identity-Influenced Coalitional Approach include members of the majority and minority taking coalitional action while being conscious of group identities. Because of the role of action, Ellsworth (1989) contended that such approaches would help ensure that members of the majority are not merely going through a personal development exercise that benefits themselves.

Considering the history of victimization faced by African Americans, West (2001) explained that this past cannot be ignored, as is advocated by conservatives focusing on “pulling oneself up by the bootstraps.” However, he rejected the liberal position of solely focusing on structural issues in which political solutions are the primary focus of betterment. He advocated a self-affirming confrontation of the nihilism and self-destruction that he sees in large pockets of black America. Hayes (2001) expanded on those ideas by explaining that this nihilism results in *ressentiment*, of which revenge, hatred, jealousy, and spite are associated. *Ressentiment* is broad and long-lasting and leads to a long-term self-poisoning attitude. The danger with *ressentiment* is that it “masks a self-imposed helplessness” (p. 250) which leads to a self-pitying rather than working toward solutions. A focus on action also protects members of minority groups as well by working against nihilism and self-destructive attitudes.

Considering identity, Green (2002) argued that labels such as “gay,” “black,” and “Latino” are not merely constructions of language, they are social constructions that have tangible consequences and material forms for people. Due to their social and material form, these identities cannot be ignored. Such perspectives conclude that categories of identity do exist, although individual identities are complex, messy, and overlapping. These categories can be used, in coalitional action, as a springboard for action.

Diversity education approaches that utilize such ideas allow education and action to be integrated, in order that members of the minority and majority work together in making changes (Ellsworth, 1989). West (2001) called for working across racial boundaries toward progressive goals, while building on the best of identity approaches. While calling African American activists to embrace blackness, West envisioned race-transcending coalitions that seek social change and avoid the risk of separatism. These ideas can be applied to LGBTQ identity and to diversity education process occurring around these issues.

### **Setting for this Study**

In seeking to understand approaches toward diversity education, this study occurs within two primary organizations. One is a large institution with three campuses and the other is a loose-knit coalition of activists located within this university system.

Most events occurred among trustees, administrators, employees, and students of the “State University” (SU) system. The largest campus, the “State University of Collegeville” (SU-C) is a traditional, residential campus located in a community of approximately 100,000 people. “State University of Metropolis” (SU-M) is in the heart of a major city. The campus has a long history of activism, multiculturalism, and engagement in the city. State University—Capital Campus (SU-CC) is a small liberal arts university located in the state capital, which also has about 100,000 residents. The university is located in a Democratic-leaning state. When this study was conducted, Democrats controlled both chambers of the General Assembly and

Democrats held all statewide elected offices. The Board of Trustees oversees the university. The governor appoints nine of its members to six-year terms, in addition to the three elected student members (one of which is appointed by the governor each year to have full voting privileges). The university has a President and each of the three campuses has a Chancellor.

Activists at Collegeville and Metropolis began working for DPBs in the late 1980s. Eventually, much of this work occurred through the SU Ad-Hoc Domestic Partner Benefits Task Force, a loose knit coalition of activists. As of January 2010, DPBs were partially, but not fully, implemented. SU provided a compelling example for this research because of the long-term nature of the effort, the work done through formal committees and informal coalitions, and because of the complex nature of a large system with three campuses.

### **Methodological Approach**

This article is part of a larger study that resulted in a qualitative, historical case study (Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1994; Stake, 1995) that sought to understand the long-term process of implementing DPBs within the SU system. Throughout the data collection process, I relied on three basic types of data. Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) explain that data can be gathered through: (a) talking with people (either orally or through surveys), (b) examining artifacts, (c) reflecting in journals (by the researcher), and (d) observing people. In this section, I explain how I used the first three types of data.

### **Interviews**

I interviewed 21 individuals who have been involved in the DPB effort since it started in the 1980s (two of those individuals were interviewed twice). I spoke with activists, administrators, and a member of the Board of Trustees who were involved in this process. Four interviews were conducted by telephone (one was a follow-up interview with someone at Metropolis, the other three individuals had moved out-of-state). Five interviews were held on the SU-M campus and one was held in downtown Metropolis. Only one interview was held at the Capital Campus. Of the 12 interviews at Collegeville, six were with people who work(ed) for the SU system offices rather than SU-C.

I used purposeful sampling for selecting those who provided the most valuable insights into the research questions. Key informants recommended others who were intimately involved in past DPB activist efforts. This snowball sampling process (Patton, 2002) began by speaking with the Director and Assistant Director of the LGBT Resources Office at the Collegeville campus. To further the snowball process, I sought other participants: (a) both those leading the effort and those taking less visible roles, (b) a representation of faculty, staff, and administrators, and (c) those involved at various stages of this effort. In seeking additional contacts, I asked that interview participants recommend others who met the above criteria. In addition to staff and faculty at multiple levels of the university, I interviewed current and former university Vice Presidents, the past Chancellors at the Metropolis and Collegeville campuses, the past university President, and a university Trustee.

I used a semi-structured interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). Individual interview guides were customized in order to address the research questions and other pertinent issues, based on the specific experiences and roles of the individual being interviewed. When participants consented, the interviews were recorded and transcribed by a hired transcriptionist. Interviewees were supplied with a copy of the transcript and given an opportunity to remove or clarify their comments.

## **Documents**

The analysis of documents can uncover rich trends and themes that may not be articulated through interviews (Anderson, et al., 1994; Patton, 2002). Dozens of records such as university reports, newspaper articles, committee minutes, and other materials were examined. Over 100 sources were documented in the full report of this study these included internal memos, policy drafts, and other correspondence. An invaluable resource was the archive of the “su-dp-benefits” listserv, used for communication between members of the three-campus coalition. As of March 12, 2008, this listserv contained 318 messages. I read each message multiple times and obtained consent from relevant posters to use their messages as part of this research.

## **Journaling**

Researcher journals are a common component of both interpretive and action-oriented projects. Journaling allows researchers to continuously reflect on their role and the theories in practice in the local situation (Hobson, 2001). In this study, journaling allowed me to continuously consider and examine my own role in the situation, which helped to prevent me from seeing participants as “others.” The journaling process allowed me to record my ongoing insights, recollections and opinions in order that my own perspective became more transparent throughout the data analysis. I wrote journal entries after each interview, each meeting, and throughout the various stages of research and analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Although I integrated data collection and data analysis throughout the research process, I have separated them into separate sections. I read and reread interview notes, transcripts, documents, notes about documents, journal entries, and observation notes throughout the process in order to consider (a) future actions in the next phase of research, (b) how new findings compare with other findings in the study, and (c) how the findings compare with theories and other literature. Data analysis occurred through narrative description of the events and actions and through thematic analysis. Narrative description occurred as a way of recording a history of the events as they occurred, in order to provide a richer understanding to readers (Stake, 1995). I used a spreadsheet to track both key events related to DPBs and the larger contextual events affecting this process. This timeline allowed me to sort out the chronology of the story.

Thematic analysis occurred as a result of iteratively reading data, taking notes, compiling narratives, and identifying themes that occurred throughout the analysis. The research questions, conceptual framework, and research literature helped to guide the initial issues to be explored. However, as I describe below, I developed the specific coding scheme primarily through inductive analysis during the ongoing data collection process (Patton, 2002). Specific instances of themes were recorded to track the source (e.g., interview, observation), the person(s) involved, and a brief description. Deviant cases or contradictory accounts were sought (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Stake, 1995), which allowed for another dimension of complexity and crystallization. Contradictory accounts and complicated notions of sexuality were sought in order to have a queer-influenced analysis (Gamson, 2000). Deductive analysis was used for identifying instances of individual education efforts and their relation to the approaches to diversity, explained above. This deductive analysis complemented the inductive analysis, which explored the complexities of these issues.

Inductive analysis was aided by Bogdan and Biklen’s “family of codes” (as cited in

Anderson, et al., 1994), which included setting/context codes, situation codes, participant perspectives, participants' ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, activity codes, event codes, strategy codes, relationship and social structure codes, and methods codes. This system provided a workable framework for organizing the data as the themes emerged. As I wrote the narrative account, I continued refining the coding scheme and returned to the data sources for additional information.

### **Narrative Overview**

Before discussing the thematic findings of this project, I will briefly outline the events occurring during the nearly 20-year process to attain DPBs within this university system. This chronological approach provides readers with the context necessary for understanding the later thematic analysis.

#### **Groups Came Together at Separate Campuses**

The effort originated from SU-C undergraduate demands for a nondiscrimination statement that included sexual orientation, which stemmed from the physical assault of a gay male student. The Campus Senate passed resolutions in 1983 and 1985 supporting such a measure, which was denied by the administration. This denial led to a group of gays and lesbians meeting with the Chancellor, who created a task force to "investigate the campus climate for gays and lesbians." The task force recommendations led to sexual orientation being listed as an "add-on" characteristic to the nondiscrimination policy in 1987, for the Collegeville campus only. This partial victory led a SU-C faculty and staff LGBT social group to develop an activist agenda that included DPBs.

At the same time, the Metropolis campus administration began "status committees" to address the concerns of various communities (African Americans, Latinos, and LGB), in response to demands from university stakeholders. By 1993, the Committee on the Status of LGB Issues at Metropolis released a position paper advocating for benefits changes. After presenting the report to the Chancellor, he recommended seeking approval of the Campus Senate. Each campus has a Campus Senate, which is the campus-wide assembly for shared governance. Membership varies by campus, but always includes faculty and students, with others including academic professionals, staff, and/or administrators as members.

#### **Working with the Senates**

The SU-M group began organizing to gain approval for a resolution in the Campus Senate. Approval at SU-M came in 1995 only after risky political maneuvering by DPB advocates in order to overcome lengthy opposition and stalling by Senate leadership. After passage of the resolution, the SU-M Chancellor recommended seeking a similar resolution from the other two campus senates. The resolution easily passed at SU-C in 1996 after benefits for unmarried opposite-sex couples were added to the resolution. The Capital Campus Senate passed a resolution supporting DPBs in late 1996. The effort at the Capital Campus was led by a lesbian who filed an unsuccessful grievance over the lack of DPBs. The Senates Conference, a joint group from the three campuses, approved a resolution supporting DPBs in January 1998.

#### **Pressuring Administration for Years**

After the votes by the Campus Senates and system-wide Senates Conference, the issue rested with the administration for over four and a half years. Stalling began with an April 1998

legal opinion from the University Counsel, which claimed the university could face legal risk for offering benefits that go beyond what the state offered. It is important to note that a powerful Republican President of the State Senate was vehemently opposed to DPBs and any policies or laws that supported LGBTQ issues. For years, he successfully prevented expansion of the statewide nondiscrimination act to include sexual orientation and gender identity, despite repeated passage by the House and public promises from the Republican governor to sign the bill. In such a political context, this leader had enormous power to derail major plans of the university, well beyond the DPB issue. After the legal opinion was issued, two Collegeville law professors issued an opposing opinion, but activist momentum slowed for a couple of years.

### **Coalition Building**

In 2000, as part of an effort to organize academic professionals on the SU-C campus, the lack of DPBs was raised as evidence for needing union representation. One activist in the union organized a campuswide signature campaign, in which people signed cards indicating their support for DPBs. The union's DPB card campaign spread to the Metropolis campus and ultimately led to reigniting the systemwide efforts for DPBs.

### **Formed Three-campus Coalition**

The director of the GLBT Concerns Office at SU-M, an undergraduate activist at SU-C, and the professor from Capital Campus who filed the original grievance, organized a 2002 meeting with employees and students from the three campuses. This meeting resulted in the formation of an informal coalition (SU Ad-Hoc Domestic Partner Benefits Task Force) that persisted through 2008 and ultimately achieved the partial attainment of DPBs at the SU.

### **Thematic Findings**

Primary findings regarding education efforts include: (a) education about DPBs occurring against a backdrop in which the university was embroiled in a long-term, high-profile social justice issue that resulted in activists censoring their approaches to education, (b) coalitions using education efforts in a contradictory and complicated manner, and (c) using testimonials with great success, despite the potential for problems.

### **Self-Censoring Behaviors**

When the three-campus coalition formed in early 2002, some individuals felt intense impatience over the repeated delays by the administration. At the same time, the administration had begun behind-the-scenes efforts to gain approval for DPBs. Group members disagreed over the administration's true commitment to moving the issue forward. Eventually, the group primarily utilized Harmonious Diversity Approaches and Identity-aware Approaches. To a lesser extent, the group used Identity-Influenced Coalitional Approaches.

**Public education versus behind-the-scenes approaches.** In the first email sent on the Task Force's listsev, Ann Murphy (all names are pseudonyms), a new DPB activist, suggested forming "working groups" to focus on public relations, research, litigation, fundraising, and direct action. In her interview with me she explained, "When you look at over 10 years of working on this issue in traditional means and it's not working, there comes a time when you say, other tactics need to be employed." In her email to the listserv, she asked that one of the

group's members speak during the public comment portion of the next Board of Trustees Meeting.

A leader of the Metropolis activist group responded by saying that an administrator told him the President would present the DPB issue to the board in July. The administrator "became concerned when she heard about the Task Force [and] that we would do something to jeopardize the positive direction this was taking." The SU-M activist asked that the group focus on working with the President and wait until after the July meeting to take any action. A longtime SU-M activist responded to Ann's message by saying, "I think that this is a very bad idea at this time and likely to jeopardize the work that has been done over the past ten years. Please reconsider." The leader of the DPB effort within the Collegeville academic professionals union responded by saying she supported a multi-pronged effort and that "this talk of 'jeopardizing' our push by speaking out for DPBs is alarmist." Ann explained to the group that putting this issue in front of the board "gives more credibility to [the President's] claim that DP benefits are needed because we are putting a face on an issue. We are showing an actual human being who, by virtue of her/his sexual orientation, is receiving fewer benefits..."

Throughout this string of emails, the activists disagreed on whether it was best to let the President act alone in making the case to the board. In response, Ann said "He is our ally not our savior." The leader of the union effort said "I don't believe we should hold our breath [in letting the President handle this issue alone]." After additional email exchanges, the group seemed to concede that respectful comments to the Board of Trustees would help the President's case. In the end, many more speeches were given to the Board of Trustees, which the President and other administrators indicated were very helpful in moving this process along.

Ann and the other advocates of public speaking engagements wanted to take an Identity-aware Approach to education. Those opposed to speaking publicly advocated a Harmonious Diversity Approach, in order to minimize dissonance or discomfort by board members.

**Board was addressing two highly visible, contentious issues.** At first glance, the reaction over speaking to the board seems overly cautious and "alarmist." However, it is important to understand that during this same time period, the administration and Board of Trustees were addressing two other larger, more visible issues regularly. One issue centered around the highly controversial Native American mascot and the other regarding the protests of the Graduate Employees Union. These volatile situations, especially regarding the mascot, created a complex contextual atmosphere that instilled caution in some activists and spurred others to desire more aggressive tactics.

Activists may have had a reason to be patient in working with the President. There was a fear that overly aggressive tactics would result in members of the Board becoming entrenched in their positions. In speaking with me, the former Collegeville Chancellor explained,

I think SU is a place that doesn't like to respond to pressure. And many places are, so I don't mean that negatively at all. But, I think, the most effective changes that I saw, happened through a kind of give and take collaborative process. So the domestic partner issue was a good example of it working well, I think, eventually.

This tension between those advocating for collaboration with the administration and those advocating for more direct approaches may have been healthy and productive in the end although it may have led to a prolonged process. In the debate over the appropriate level of self-censoring, the DPB activists teetered between Harmonious Diversity Approaches and

Identity-aware Approaches, in which LGBTQ activists sought to persuade others to support their cause.

### **Complicated Education and Activism through Coalitions**

Coalitions provided valuable platforms from which activists launched and re-launched their education and lobbying efforts over the years. These coalitions were never sustained in the long-term; however, they provided the activists with bursts of energy that resulted in moving the issue forward.

**Education of the Campus Senates.** The process of working with the Campus Senates in the early 1990s was one of give and take. This process began at Metropolis. Activists there gave up on including DPBs for unmarried opposite-sex couples due to a perceived lack of work from other groups, like the Committee on the Status of Women. At Collegeville, senators questioned why the policy was exclusively focused on same-sex partners since “some prominent faculty were not married but were living with an opposite-sex partner,” according to one activist. As a result, the resolution was broadened and the successful resolution called for DPBs for both same-sex and opposite-sex partners. One of the early Metropolis activists perceived that straight women on the Collegeville campus were “pretty influential and pretty active in taking on these kinds of issues.” He perceived the Collegeville resolution’s easy passage as resulting from “broader support from a broader coalition,” as opposed to the more narrow focus in Metropolis, which resulted in a tumultuous approval process. In Metropolis, the early activists were educating others about LGBTQ issues and making requests, as an identity group. In Collegeville, the early activists educated while working with others to bring about changes for a broader constituency, which suggests they used an Identity-Influenced Coalitional Approach.

**Education through union involvement.** As mentioned earlier, the efforts within the Academic Professionals Union (APU) largely re-ignited discussion of the DPB issue in 2000 after it had become dormant. This campaign helped increase visibility for the fledgling union and for the DPBs issue. LGBTQ activists used identity to organize while mobilizing others to their cause within a larger campaign focused on union organization. The APU effort appears to be a good example of an Identity-Influenced Coalitional Approach, with a coalition working together in advocating for opposite-sex DPBs, same-sex DPBs, and economic issues. However, Christine, the union’s leader of the DPB effort, had a different perspective when reflecting on that time period. When asked about the ultimate exclusion of *opposite*-sex DPBs from the university’s plan, she said,

From my perspective and some of my queer colleagues, there were not any straight people involved in this effort. .... They may have been, sort of like, ‘yeah I support that.’ But, if you want opposite-sex domestic partner benefits, get your ass out there and work, and don’t just sit there and complain. .... And I know that’s a stupid way to drive wedges... . To me, that was just another example of heterosexual privilege. Like, you all have the option to get married, and you may not believe in the institution of marriage. That’s fine. But if you want things to be different, then work for it.

Although the APU provided a platform from which Christine could work for DPBs when other university DPB efforts had slowed, she perceived that she did most of the DPB work within the APU. APU leadership provided support for the work and the APU provided resources

for printing materials. Despite the lack of complete support, the APU provided a valuable platform from which the profile of the DPB issue could be raised significantly, but the broad-based queer coalition may not have been as strong as it appeared.

### **Testimonials Used with Great Success**

Testimonials by LGBTQ individuals served a central role in the attainment of DPBs in this university. In addition to being a very effective way of winning people to one's side, testimonials also have the power to reshape (or "to queer") conservative spaces. Within this DPB effort, both successes and challenges emerged through the use of testimonials.

**Bringing change through conciliatory and collaborative education.** In state universities, cerebral messages dominate the discourse. However, administrators and board members heard a combination of rational equity arguments, economic arguments, and the use of emotion as advocates spoke publicly about the need for DPBs. As I spoke with decision makers, I was repeatedly told that the most effective arguments came as a result of LGBTQ individuals meeting with administrators and giving public comments during meetings of the Board of Trustees. Personal familiarity was crucial in winning allies on this issue. In my discussions with SU decision makers, they repeatedly complimented the university's DPB advocates on their professional and collaborative approach. In meetings of the board, meetings with administrators, and in other conversations, advocates were perceived as respectful, poignant, and personable. Nearly all decision makers noted the contrast between DPB advocates and the opponents of the Native American mascot, who were perceived as raucous, brash, and disrespectful. In this case, I conclude that the mascot's opponents helped the DPB cause by allowing DPB advocates to serve as a contrasting group. The board and administrators were happy to engage with the calm DPB supporters, when the mascot's opponents were engaging in civil disobedience and calling them "racists" during board meetings.

In considering Hill's (1996) and Grace and Hill's (2004) ideas about initiating LGBTQ-friendly changes through education, I found that LGBTQ employees effectively educated board members and administrators about the troublesome heteronormative policies they were perpetuating. Decision makers and administrators spoke with sincerity about the respect they had for the people who spoke out in support of DPBs. The act of "putting a human face" on the policy was repeatedly mentioned as being effective in changing minds. In other contexts, activists used competitive arguments successfully in explaining that the university was at a competitive disadvantage by not having these benefits. By varying their approach depending on the situation, the DPB activists performed education that eventually brought larger societal change (Grace & Hill, 2004) beyond SU.

Although the activists' approach to collaborative and conciliatory education relied heavily on tactics from the Harmonious Diversity Approaches, they ultimately used other approaches in pressing decision makers to enact changes. The goal of educating heterosexuals about the needs of LGBTQ workers was combined with the goal of pushing decision makers to change policies for these individuals who organized around their identity, as discussed below.

**The risk of becoming a spectacle.** Although apparently successful, the public addressing of DPBs can be problematized by using Mayo's (2007) argument that LGBTQ people become a spectacle. An example of this process occurs when speakers share stories of oppression while assuming that the audience knows nothing about such experiences. Even in a

relatively liberal academic environment, putting oneself into a situation like speaking publicly for LGBTQ causes can be detrimental to careers. As an alternative to becoming a spectacle, Mayo (2007) advocates using a method of accusation, in which others are called into accountability. She contends that by calling on individuals to *act* rather than merely *listen*, spectatorship is minimized and change is more likely to occur. The public education efforts for DPBs were ultimately effective in calling administrators and board members into action.

*Activists sought action and personal development by decision makers.* When examining the DPB advocates' use of the public speaking time at board meetings, I found that most of the speakers engaged in a public coming out as LGBTQ. Such public outings lend themselves to spectatorship due to the often-compelling and engaging nature of the stories (Mayo, 2007). Public board meetings are not a two-way conversation. The former VP of Administration explained that board members almost never engage with speakers in the public comment portion. In that sense, the LGBTQ speakers were a spectacle. Personal development of administrators resulted, which Mayo might argue is useless without action. However, the former VP of Administration explained that the courage needed to speak out about issues related to one's sexuality was especially poignant to him:

I will tell you that even in this "advanced" day and age, for someone to stand up publicly and talk openly about his or her sexual preference. Hell, I don't do that, and I would not be able to. Off the top of my head, I can't think of an issue that mattered so much that I would do that. My personal reaction was that those testimonials were very helpful. To put a face on the issue, so you're not just looking at numbers on a page...

In his case, the courage displayed by activists in publicly displaying their sexuality allowed him to see that this issue deeply mattered to people. Additionally, the former President of the university explained his sensitivity for diversity issues, supported by other evidence that I uncovered, resulted from his many years at SU-M and his long-term engagement with the Chancellor's status committees. He explained, "If I had not come here and I had stayed in Collegeville and I had risen to some sort of position where you had to deal with these issues, I'd expect my actions might have been different." In these cases, both the public education and the calls to action resulted in both heightened sensitivity and likelihood of enacting changes.

Speakers called the Board into action and sometimes accused members of being indifferent to heterosexism. Although the speakers continuously attempted to educate "unknowledgeable" decision makers about this issue, Board members continued claiming that the issue was out of their hands or that more information was needed. The major exception was a new named Trustee Todd Ritter, who acted quickly to pass the DPB proposal after hearing two strongly worded speeches in which one frustrated advocate accused the Board of ignoring the university nondiscrimination policy and another said the university was at risk for lawsuits and grievances. He explained to me that if the university continued not offering these benefits, it was "nothing short of discrimination." Ritter was widely credited by administrators with attaining approval for the proposal that allowed employees to be reimbursed for purchasing insurance for same-sex partners, ten years after DPBs were initially proposed. After securing passage of the DPB proposal among board members, Ritter met with LGBTQ employees to discuss the ongoing problems with deficiencies in the new policies and was asked how he could help resolve the issues. This meeting is an example of an accusational conversation, rather than a case of LGBTQ people being the spectacle. The meeting resulted in some relative progress in refining the benefits.

Overall, the group effectively used the coming out technique to get the attention of decision makers; however, they balanced it by using accusational techniques during the latter stages of board approval. In later years, the accusational conversations shifted to the HR department as the DPB Task Force became a type of HR advisory committee. Those conversations were not focused on the university's top leadership, which possibly resulted in long-term inertia in attaining full DPBs, due to the comfort and close relationship with HR.

Great debate occurred over the years regarding the tone and content of the group, how tightly controlled its message should be, and who the message should be targeted toward. However, in the end, the DPB activists used work-based education to seek and achieve changes rather than to merely create awareness. Such a stance suggests an Identity-aware Approach, in which members of the shared identity group sought others support in bringing changes.

### Conclusions

The combination of self-censoring, coalition building, and use of testimonials resulted in a generally successful effort to attain DPBs, although each had its problems and risks. In some sense, the activists navigated the classical challenges facing social change efforts—the tension between being overly accommodationist or overly aggressive. Put another way, such efforts exist on the continuum from accommodatory to transformative (Salt, Cervero, & Herod, 2000). In most social change movements, a combination of players is needed at various points along that continuum (Raeburn, 2004b). In addition to illustrating this need, the study examined the use of various approaches to diversity, which do not line up neatly along that continuum. The most radical or aggressive tactics were used when the group adopted Identity-aware Approaches, while some of its most accommodationist efforts also originated from that perspective.

Identity-Influenced Coalitional Approaches were used at various points of this nearly 20-year effort, as activists adopted approaches like West's (2001) and Ellsworth's (1989), in building coalitions focused on action. For example, on multiple occasions, the group educated for broader social changes (e.g., economic justice for employees) by working together with other groups. In other cases in which the group sought to align interests of administrators and activists, they utilized more of a Harmonious Diversity approach. However, at most points during this long effort, the group used Identity-aware Approaches in seeking LGBTQ-specific changes. These changes were sought directly from decision makers or through enlisting the support of others, rather than working through true coalitional efforts where members seek changes beyond LGBTQ-specific concerns.

Testimonials played a significant role in helping the group to attain policy changes, primarily occurring through Identity-aware Approaches. The testimonials sought both personal development and action by decision makers and other university stakeholders. By their very nature, efforts geared toward identity-oriented *policy changes* call for identity groups to recruit others into action rather than focusing on “being” or desiring pity, as Brown (2006) warns is possible in identity movements. The more complicated task is to continue the call for action when seeking culture and climate changes after tangible policies have changed (Renn, 2010). Campus climate is multifaceted and is influenced by issues of student access/retention, curriculum/pedagogy, intergroup/intragroup relations, research/scholarship, external relations, as well as university policies (Rankin & Reason, 2008).

Grace and Hill (2004) called for integrating queer ideas into adult education processes, which results in education at the micro level, education at the macro level, and a queer praxis through individual and cultural transformation. All three of these occurred through the activists'

work, despite the discomfort of decision makers who preferred to deal with less controversial issues. Beginning in the early 1990s, the DPB effort used education to expose macro structures that perpetuate heteronormativity, in this case, the university's heterosexist policies. The activists used education consistently to counter both overt and subtle anti-queer perspectives, primarily through the educative act of giving testimonials that explained the importance of these policy changes for lives of LGBTQ employees. Lastly, the group relied on education to consistently spur both LGBTQ individuals and heterosexuals to engage in collective action and make decisions that resulted in policy changes.

The constructions of diversity utilized in this study apply beyond the issue of DPBs and relate to diversity education in other settings. Activists used multiple approaches to diversity in this nearly 20-year process. I conclude that it succeeded with little backlash afterwards because of the flexibility and continual use of various approaches to diversity in various organizational contexts. Although these various uses resulted in ongoing tensions among activists, those tensions were ultimately productive. Campus activists seeking changes can learn from the lessons of these activists at State University by varying their approaches to diversity to fit the context, which can vary greatly from one moment to the next.

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