Finding Queer Allies: The Impact of Ally Training

and Safe Zone Stickers on Campus Climate

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Structured Abstract

To counter heterosexism, homophobia, and gender binarism in higher education, "safe zone" or "ally" programs are efforts by American universities to create a welcoming environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) members of the campus community. This study describes perceptions of campus climate for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff and examines the impact of ally training and safe zone stickers at a large, public university in California during the 5-year period of 2002-2007. It used a mixed-methods research design: a survey was collected from predominantly-Latino/a students through an LGBT student organization, another survey was collected from faculty and staff who participated in the training, and a focus group was conducted among a subset of training participants. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to provide descriptive statistics and content themes. Findings show LGBT students perceive faculty and staff as accepting, especially those who have taken an ally training, but do not feel safer in the presence of safe zone stickers. Faculty and staff perceive campus climate as barely tolerant of LGBTQ persons. They did report affective and social benefits from both the ally training and safe zone stickers. The study shows that such programs can improve understanding of LGBTQ persons but cannot advance the campus climate beyond mere tolerance without administrative support and additional resources. It also confirms the importance of training before the issuance of stickers, primarily to eliminate those who cannot serve as effective allies due to prejudice. Six specific recommendations for improving the training and campus climate are identified. (Contains 3 tables.)

Published literature in the field of education has long acknowledged a strong link between learning environments and learning outcomes; it is known that students perform best in an atmosphere of affirmation and appreciation (McMillan and Forsyth, 1991; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Rendon, 1994; Tiberius and Billson, 1991). Learning is enhanced when students feel validated and enjoy positive interactions with their peers and teachers, and this influence extends beyond the classroom. The educational environment is often referred to as "campus climate," which can be characterized as warm and affirming to chilly and hostile. In addition, it is known that perception of campus climate differs among social groups, with women and racial ethnic minorities usually perceiving it as less hospitable than do men and whites (Cabrera, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn, 1999; Hall and Sandler, 1982). Similarly, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) people perceive the climate on college campuses to be less hospitable than do heterosexual and cisgender (non-transgender) people (Brown, 2004).

Educators are beginning to recognize the need to make colleges and universities more welcoming of LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff (Evans, 2000; Getz and Kirkley, 2003; Rankin, 2003). Like their heterosexual and cisgender peers, LGBTQ students need a nondiscriminatory learning environment in which to succeed academically and to grow personally. LGBTQ faculty and staff members need a nondiscriminatory working environment to perform at their full potential and to provide optimum learning opportunities to all students, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The concerns of LGBTQ students are well-documented (Draughn, Elkins, and Roy, 2002). Many arrive at college already scarred from years spent in high schools and middle

schools overtly hostile to LGBTQ persons. In a national survey of the experiences of LGBTQ students in secondary education, Kosciw and Diaz (2006) paint a disturbing picture of name-calling, harassment and violence. Nearly two-thirds of their respondents reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. Over a third had experienced physical harassment and nearly a fifth had been physically assaulted. The University of Georgia (2002) conducted a campus climate survey and found that homophobic remarks are rampant, with 90% of respondents having heard them. 25% reported feeling unsafe; 10% had experienced property destruction; and 10% had been threatened with physical violence because of their sexual orientation. 86% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the administration's response.

In an effort to improve campus climate for LGBTQ persons, remedial programs began to emerge in the 1990s. Often called "Gay-Straight Alliances" in high schools and middle schools, and "Safe Zone" (or Safe Space) or "Ally" (or Allies) programs in colleges and universities, the components of such programs may include: stickers with identifying symbols, educational presentations, an email listserv for communication, an advisory board, a Web site listing resources, periodic social events, and a campus resource center.

Ally Programs and Ally Identity Development

In the context of social justice work, an "ally" is defined as someone "who is a member of the 'dominant' or 'majority' group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed group" (Washington and Evans, 1991). A central feature of such ally programs is the development of a support network among students, faculty, and staff members who do not themselves identify as

LGBTQ. It is believed that, because non-LGBTQ persons are the majority community, their endorsement is valuable and necessary to mitigating the effects of LGBTQ discrimination. Ellen Broido (2000) was among the first to examine the psychosocial process by which heterosexuals come to support the LGBTQ community in higher education. She describes the stages through which an individual must travel in order to become such an ally. Another model by which Broido analyzed heterosexual attitude change is the "cycle of liberation," based on the literature of oppression and social justice.

Extending Broido's work, Getz and Kirkley (2003) made a distinction between an *ally* and *advocate*. Although both work for an end to oppression, ally refers to a member of the dominant or majority group, and advocate refers to a member of the targeted or minority group. Those authors analyzed heterosexual ally identity development within the context of an Ally program called Rainbow Educators at the University of San Diego. The Rainbow Educators are a team of students, faculty, and staff who receive extensive 30-hour training on LGBTQ issues, and who share their knowledge via campus presentations. As did Broido (2000), Getz and Kirkley highlighted the importance of meaningful contact between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ persons in achieving attitude change. They found that the Rainbow Educators process enabled participants to replace an initial in-group/out-group dynamic with a sense of connectedness with each other and mutual support for the LGBTQ community.

Safe Zone Programs

Nearly synonymous with ally programs are safe zone (SZ) programs. Indeed, there is significant overlap, as allies (and advocates) are those who LGBTQ persons find inside safe zones. These programs use a sticker with a recognizable symbol to identify individuals who are

LGBTQ allies, and many offer trainings designed to prepare them for their public role. The first systematic evaluation of a campus SZ program was conducted in 2002 by Nancy Evans at Iowa State University. This program focused on widespread distribution of stickers, which were available for the asking; training was not required. Its goal was to increase visibility throughout campus and thereby demonstrate ISU's acceptance of its LGBTQ community. Over 2000 stickers were given to faculty, staff, students, and alumni, and to nearby colleges, high schools, organizations, and businesses. An educational brochure was included with each sticker.

Evans (2002) found that heterosexual allies saw the SZ stickers as a way to make a statement about their values, and as providing "teachable moments" for educating those who sought information or expressed opposition. Many felt the proliferation of stickers helped to improve ISU's conservative image. The benefits for LGBTQ faculty and staff were even greater, as they felt affirmed and were consequently motivated to form a support group for themselves. A number of LGBTQ students felt safe enough to disclose their sexual orientation, or "come out," to those who had posted stickers. The success of the SZ program is summed up by the Associate Dean who spearheaded it: "Perhaps the chilly climate for LGBT folks has been warmed by 4 or 5 degrees…I don't think of Safe Zone as a jackhammer kind of project; I think of it as a thermometer kind of project." (p. 538).

Controversy exists over whether training should be a prerequisite for posting a Safe Zone sticker. Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg (2002) promote mandatory training for SZ members, and point to risks inherent in the random distribution of stickers. Some may post stickers because they believe it is "cool" or "politically correct" but without the knowledge and skills to address

real-life issues faced by LGBTQ students. Others, regarding homosexuality as wrong or a sin, may try to "convert" LGBTQ students to a heterosexual orientation.

Poynter and Tubbs (2007) examined various SZ program models and concluded that, while mandatory training may limit the number of SZ members, this disadvantage is outweighed by the greater commitment and competence that results. Attending a two-hour training session may not guarantee LGBTQ-cultural competence, but they believe it does demonstrate a more positive motive. They also recommend SZ members sign a contract—an agreement to meet the responsibilities of an ally and provide unbiased support to LGBTQ people on campus.

Additional concerns have been voiced about SZ programs. Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg (2002) note that there can be confusion over whether an entire area is considered "safe" or just the individual who posted the sticker. Some view the stickers as evidence of "special privileges" for LGBTQ people, a kind of reverse discrimination. It is thought that offering visible support for one group of students may discourage other groups from seeking needed services, for example, at the campus health clinic or counseling center. Others worry that too many stickers may lead to complacency or a false sense of security. And as documented by Evans (2002), SZ stickers are subject to defacement and those posting them are subject to harassment.

A SZ program was evaluated in 2003 by Finkel, Storaasli, Banfele, and Schaefer at the University of Denver. This program focused on training and differed somewhat from others in that it was required for all incoming graduate students in its school of professional psychology. Program participants endorsed their SZ training—giving it an average rating of four points on a five-point scale, with 90% stating they would recommend it to others. Some students reiterated

the notion discussed above that training should be required for *everyone* receiving a sticker, as the SZ symbol implies that the person posting it is competent to handle LGBTQ issues.

In 2007, Bahner studied APA-accredited clinical psychology programs throughout the United States, asking students if they believe their programs meet the American Psychological Association's mandate for LGBTQ coursework in professional preparation. Many found their classroom experiences to be insufficient and reported a lack of specific focus on LGBTQ issues despite a generally strong emphasis on multiculturalism. If LGBTQ issues were addressed, it was largely at the initiation of students themselves. Over half of study participants claimed that they know of no openly LGBTQ faculty in their programs, although they recognize the importance of having "out" faculty. Among the positive findings were that many expressed a desire for the LGBTQ-specific training and held affirmative views towards LGBTQ persons.

Campus Resource Centers

The eventual outcome of some campus climate assessments and Safe Zone and Ally programs is the establishment of an officially-sponsored campus resource center (CRC) or office. Zemsky (2004) used the University of Minnesota as a case study for the establishment of a CRC to promote LGBTQ interests. Beemyn (2002) reported that over half the universities that have undertaken campus climate assessments ultimately opened such a CRC. Ritchie and Banning (2001) conducted a survey of eight universities with LGBTQ centers and, like Beemyn, found that most started with a campus climate survey. In some cases, the CRC was established in response to a homophobic incident on campus or in the larger community.

Few CRCs yet include the word *ally* or *allies* in their titles, although none claim to serve exclusively LGBTQ persons. In fact, Beemyn (2002) found that 95% conduct outreach to

heterosexual allies. When Bullard (2004) surveyed a group of LGBTQ CRC directors, she discovered they place a high priority on involving allies in the centers, such as appointing them to advisory boards.

In 2003, Rankin conducted a landmark study of 14 universities with LGBTQ resource centers. She found the presence of such centers helped to create a safer and more welcoming environment for the LGBTQ community, as documented by lower rates of reported homophobic incidents. However, Rankin (2006) later stressed the need for rigorous empirical and longitudinal research to evaluate the impact of the centers and programs such as ally trainings and safe zone initiatives.

This study examined campus climate at one university after ally trainings had been conducted for five years. The research questions addressed were: What is the campus climate for LGBTQ people? What affect have the ally training and safe zone stickers had on campus climate, program participants and on students? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What changes are needed in the training to improve campus climate for LGBTQ students and employees?

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study was conducted at a large public university in California during the 2006-07 academic year. A sample of student participants was recruited primarily from an LGBTQ student organization; a second sample of faculty and staff was recruited from participants in ally trainings that had previously been offered on campus. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data, consisting of a focus group and two surveys. Over a five-year period, from 2002 to

2007, the program provided 16 two- to three-hour training sessions to prospective allies. Safe zone (SZ) stickers (see Appendix) were issued to trainees who requested one and who signed an agreement to espouse LGBTQ-affirmative values. Note: Interpretation of the study data may be influenced by the active participation of all four authors in the ally training and safe zone program. Three authors were active trainers from its inception; one for the last year only. One author developed the training curriculum and served as program coordinator.

Purposive sampling was used to obtain responses from visible LGBTQ student leaders. A survey was distributed through the LGBTQ student organization and through word of mouth. It assessed campus climate with questions about faculty and staff attitudes and treatment of LGBTQ persons, as well as their own experiences as LGBTQ students at this university. To assess the ally training program, including safe zone (SZ) stickers, students were asked how they thought it affected the campus climate and other students' expectations and behaviors.

Another survey was distributed by email to all faculty and staff who had completed an ally training. Participants were asked to rate the campus climate for LGBTQ people, and about the effects of the SZ stickers and ally training. Several volunteered qualitative comments. Participants were also asked to indicate whether they were willing to participate in a focus group to delve deeper into these issues; seven did express interest, and three ultimately participated. The focus group was moderated by two of the authors and was conducted in an unstructured format. Two general questions were asked: (1) What did you learn from Ally training and how did it help you? (2) What are your feelings and feedback on campus climate? How friendly is it toward LGBTQ people?

The quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS computer program, providing descriptive statistics. Content analysis was used to analyze the focus group transcript and qualitative comments from the surveys. Final themes were established after reading the transcripts. Codes were applied to the themes and the constant comparison method was used to analyze the material. Constant comparative analysis is a naturalistic method that compares between and across thematic material (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of the issues.

Demographics of Study Participants

Students. Forty-one students participated in the study. Approximately half identified as women and half as men, one as transgender/transsexual and one as gender-queer. Two-thirds of the women identified their sexual orientation as lesbian; the rest as bisexual, gay, straight, questioning, or pansexual. Over three-fourths of the men identified as gay; the rest as bisexual and queer. The transgender/transsexual and gender-queer participants identified their sexual orientation as questioning. Almost one-third of the students reported being "totally out" on campus, as well as off campus. Of the remaining two-thirds, most reported being out with either a few or many people.

The average age of this sample was 24 (SD = 6.7) with a modal age of 18 years. One-third was college seniors, with the rest spread evenly across other academic grades. On average, they had been at the university for 2.3 years. The students' racial/ethnic identity consisted of a majority Chicano/Latino/Hispanic (43%), followed by White/Caucasian (30%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (11%). The remaining 16% were distributed among African-American/Black, Middle Eastern, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and other/Euro-American.

Faculty and Staff. Nineteen staff and faculty members participated in the study. Half identified as heterosexual and half as LGBTQ: four gay men including one who also identified as transgender female-to-male, two lesbians who also identified as bisexual and queer, respectively, one transgender male-to-female, and one bisexual. The average age was 49, and ranged from 37 to 68 years. Their racial/ethnic identity consisted of a majority White/Caucasian (69%) and a minority (31%) people of color, including Asian American/Asian/Pacific Islander, African-American, and Eurasian. Most of this sample was faculty (76%), with the remainder staff (18%) and administration (6%). The participants reported having completed their ally training in the following years: 47% in 2002; 29% in 2003; 18% in 2004, and 6% in 2006.

RESULTS

Campus Climate for LGBTQ People

Students. LGBTQ students participating in the study reported they were more likely to conceal their identity from other students (57%) than from university employees (33%): instructors, staff, or administrators. Most participants (73%) did not agree that faculty held negative attitudes toward LGBTQ students, including themselves (87%). Similarly, most (87%) did not agree that they had been treated unfairly by faculty due to their LGBTQ identity. However, 61% knew of *other* LGBTQ students who had experienced negative consequences, harassment, or discrimination from university employees.

Faculty and Staff. Most ally training participants (68%) rated campus climate for LGBTQ people as *tolerant*. 10% rated it as friendly, and 6% rated it as ignorant/invisible. The remaining 16% wrote in that campus climate was sometimes hostile, even though that was not one of the

response choices: "I'm not sure, but I suspect it ranges from tolerant to hostile"; "It really depends on which department, which people and what context…some are very supportive. Others extremely hostile."; "tolerant for students and simply ignored by faculty members"; and "depended on the area or department."

Impact of Ally Training on Campus Climate

Students. Only 27 of the 38 LGBTQ students in the sample reported knowing someone who had completed an ally training at this university. Most agreed that it had spurred positive change, as evidenced by the following responses: (1) 78% felt more comfortable in class with faculty who had taken the training; (2) 77% expected to be treated more fairly by faculty who display a SZ sticker; (3) 91% believed the training reduces anti-LGBTQ bias; (4) 81% would be more likely to "come out" to faculty who display a sticker; and (5) 90% expected better awareness of LGBTQ issues from those who have taken the training. Conversely, the ally program did not necessarily make these students feel safer. 85% did not agree they felt safe near an office with a SZ sticker displayed; in fact, 53% had seen such stickers vandalized. 64% reported they believe that ally training is not enough to guarantee less LGBTQ bias from instructors, staff, or administrators. (See Table 2 on page 31.)

Faculty and Staff. 63% of the ally training participants said their attitude toward LGBTQ persons did not change as a result of the training; the same percentage said their knowledge of LGBTQ issues increased only slightly. However, the focus group transcript and qualitative comments on the survey revealed other benefits of the training and SZ stickers, and many stated that the content helped to expand upon what they already knew.

One focus group member said she liked the training model, calling it "multi-dimensional in terms of sexual orientation and identity". She said this model clarified issues for her and her students (the training was provided for her class). The students were required to keep a journal of their reactions to discrimination issues raised in the training. She said her students did not "move to where I would have liked them to move, [but] they at least seemed like they were opening up."

Some reported training benefits that were social or affective, rather than cognitive, in nature. Focus group members expressed appreciation for the opportunity to gain support from and provide support to their peers, as well as to learn about difficulties their students were having. For example, one faculty who took the training heard about a homophobic remark at her students' field placement site. With this information, she was able to report the remark to an appropriate authority at that site. A survey participant reported feeling empowered by the training: "The Ally exposure I received via the training empowered me through my transition as a transsexual woman. After attending the Ally training I realized I was not alone."

Impact of Safe Zone Stickers on Campus Climate

Most faculty/staff participants in this study (90%) signed an ally agreement following their training. Reasons given by the few who did not, however, are revealing. One participant explained: "Our group…was concerned with wording in the agreement specifically asking heterosexuals to denounce *heterosexualism* [agreement uses word *heterosexism*]. Many felt the wording was inappropriate." Another wrote: "I thought displaying the sticker would compromise my ability to counsel homophobic students and hopefully raise their consciousness." These objections surfaced when the trainers attempted to define the term *heterosexual privilege*. A

heated discussion that ensued left some participants feeling defensive and dissatisfied with the

training. One described it this way:

> Our session became confrontational between some of the trainers and participants.
> I believe this was because of a lack of understanding cultural differences of the
> participants by the trainers. Trainers might need more training themselves on how
> to deal with confrontation in a restrained, positive manner.

Nonetheless, most (84%) participants reported they actually displayed the SZ sticker they

had received. When asked what impact they believe the stickers have had on students, ten

selected the answer "raised awareness" and nine selected "helped LGBTQ students feel safer."

Neither "no impact" nor "made heterosexual students uncomfortable" was selected by any

participant. Another added "possibly made heterosexual students uncomfortable – or at least

increased their dissonance about LGBTQ individuals." Another wrote "also [impacted] staff and

other administrators who asked me [about sticker]." Lastly, one wrote: "Made others think I

was a member of said community [and I am]."

When asked what impact displaying the SZ sticker had on the participants personally, 11

selected the answer "made me proud to support the LGBTQ community and show my open-

mindedness." One wrote: "I feel as though I am making a public statement about something I

believe in AND hope that it would help a student who is LGBTQ feel more comfortable in

his/her environment – even if s/he didn't speak directly to me." Additional comments included:

"felt more directly supportive of LGBTQ campus," "every visitor to my website was reminded

of the program," and "a chance to openly express my personal and professional values of respect

and support."

Faculty and staff also reported some negative consequences of displaying a SZ sticker.

Four participants had theirs stolen and others report reported negative remarks about them. When

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asked if they have ever confronted a student or co-worker/colleague who made derogatory remarks about LGBTQ people, 71% said *yes*. One participant believed the presence of the sticker minimized negative comments in class: "Seems like frequency of insensitive comments in classes is very minimal. BUT there is good awareness I am [an] Ally member." Only 42% reported that students had come to talk with them about LGBTQ issues but overall, reactions to the stickers were reported as either positive (37%) or neutral (63%); no one answered "negative." Over half (53.3%) of the participants believe that the stickers improved the campus image so that it "looks more progressive." Most participants (83%) agreed that they handle LGBTQ issues differently since the training. (See Table 3 on page 32.)

Recommendations for Future Ally Trainings

Almost all (95%) ally training participants agreed they would recommend the training to colleagues or co-workers and 93% agreed it does not need to be changed to receive their recommendation. Two further elaborated: "I'm not convinced faculty I work with have the time or willingness to attend training…but briefings of peer reviewed topics delivered in highly digestible modules would at least be reviewed…" and "For faculty I would like to see more challenging exercises."

A final set of survey questions was designed to assess interest in ongoing ally training, recommended changes to the training, and other resources needed to further the goal of improving the campus climate. Over three-fourths (78%) of the faculty/staff said they would like follow-up or additional training. Over half requested advanced training on effective ways to be an ally or advocate, relevant legal issues, and on topics of gender and sexism, and transgender

issues. Nearly half requested training on the intersection between LGBTQ issues and ethnicity, race/racism, and religion, as well as more role playing scenarios.

Focus group members explored the possibility of taking the safe zone concept into the classroom, for example, by adding a statement to their syllabi identifying it as an "LGBTQ Safe Class." Some think the training should be mandatory. As one participant explained "…it's very hard to be successful…if you don't have information, experience, and training." Administrative actions were also recommended, such as linking from university websites to the ally program website and including LGBTQ issues in university assessment.

Recommendations for Additional Resources

Faculty and staff were asked to rank-order a list of five resources they would like to see on campus to support the LGBTQ community. The top choice was an LGBTQ resource center with professional staff hired to conduct training and perform related duties. Also frequently-recommended was mandatory LGBTQ sensitivity training for all segments of the campus community: students, staff, and administrators. Focus group members discussed the need for university administrators to confront internal discrimination and to provide a better campus climate for their peers. The group felt that accountability for administrators and staff, especially supervisors, is missing at this university. One member related this example of discrimination:

> There are several openly gay and lesbian administrators on the highest level on this campus. . . But I do talk to my colleagues and every now and then I hear stories . . . that even though having achieved the rank . . . that there are still [LGBTQ discrimination] issues that come up for them and there are still comments that are made.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the small and non-random sample, the findings presented above should be considered exploratory in nature, and thus, cannot be generalized to the entire population. Although the sample of LGBTQ students was small, it closely reflects the entire student population in terms of race, gender, age, time on campus, and class ranking. In addition, as a purposive sample of LGBTQ student activists, and faculty/staff/administrators who completed the ally training and displayed safe zone stickers, the opinions of these participants may carry more weight than their numbers would indicate. Quantitative data are complemented by qualitative data from the focus group and open-ended questions on the surveys. This deeper information from "experts" about campus climate further adds to the credibility of the findings for this university; it also contributes to the current body of literature about LGBTQ campus climate.

Campus Climate

Recommendation #1: Provide targeted intervention for university departments with the worst climates for LGBTQ people.

The findings show a mixed perception of campus climate for LGBTQ people. Among the students, campus climate is viewed negatively because many report concealing their identity, especially from other students. Perhaps this is a result of the related finding that many know LGBTQ students who have been targets of discrimination. Conversely, other aspects of campus climate are viewed positively, such as faculty attitudes and fair treatment of LGBTQ students, and the students' comfort in coming out to faculty. Perception of campus climate is also mixed

among faculty and staff -- most characterized it as simply tolerant, while some characterized it as hostile, invisible, or ignorant. It seems to vary among academic departments. These findings support those of Brown (2004), which show significant differences in perception and attitudes among various academic disciplines and between employees and LGBTQ students. Customized training and outreach to those departments which display the most problematic attitudes may be a logical next step for the ally program.

Ally Training and Safe Zone Stickers

Recommendation #2: Advertise and promote the ally program more aggressively.

Awareness of the ally training program is limited, even after five years of operation. Among students, a sizable minority did not know anyone who had taken it. Trainees anecdotally reported encountering other faculty and staff who did not know it existed. Most learned about the ally training through their supervisors or at the annual faculty retreat. Clearly, efforts are needed to promote and market the program to reach greater numbers of potential allies.

Recommendation #3: Provide avenues of support and networking for LGBTQ allies and advocates.

Perception of the ally training's impact varied widely among students and faculty/staff. The majority of students perceived positive changes, yet they felt that training alone is insufficient to reduce LGBTQ bias. Ally trainees did not report significant learning or attitude change as a result of the training, yet they did report other benefits not anticipated by this study's authors. These tangential benefits include the opportunity to network with other LGBTQ allies and advocates. This university provides no place for these people to connect, share resources, and explore ways to act on their values. The chance to find like-minded colleagues was judged as

more valuable than the actual content of the training by faculty and staff who participated in the survey and/or focus group. The authors consider this to be a key finding. With new awareness of a previously-unmet need filled by the training, the ally program can more consciously build upon that strength. The ally program could tap into the work of Broido (2000), Getz and Kirkley (2003), and other authors who have created models of ally identity development to guide interested heterosexuals through this process. Both Beemyn (2002) and Bullard (2004) promote the inclusion of heterosexual allies in efforts to improve campus climate.

Recommendation #4: Develop and offer specialized training modules on advanced LGBTQ and related diversity topics.

Another important finding is the desire for more advanced content, especially about diversity issues within the LGBTQ community. It seems that those who are drawn to ally trainings already have basic information and would benefit from a higher level of discourse. This complements the recommendation by Draughn, Elkins, and Roy ((2002) for "refresher sessions" on in-depth topics about each population represented in the LGBTQ acronym, the connection among all forms of oppression, and training in group interaction skills.

Recommendation #5: Require basic training and certification before issuing safe zone stickers.

Although as stated in Recommendation #4, most trainees had at least some understanding of and sensitivity to LGBTQ issues, there were a few who did not. Among those who refused to sign the ally agreement and accept a safe zone sticker, stated reasons were a reluctance to denounce heterosexuality and discourage students from freely expressing biased opinions. These trainees apparently misunderstood or rejected the existence of heterosexism as presented by the

trainers and/or held a misguided desire to ensure the comfort of homophobic people. Among some faculty and staff, this finding reveals entrenched values and beliefs that may not easily be mitigated by educational efforts such as the ally program, and certainly not within the context of a two-hour training. While disappointing for the trainers, it is fortunate that these individuals did not accept a SZ sticker and present themselves as LGBTQ allies. That vetting process provided by the training may actually be one of its most important purposes.

Another problem which surfaced through the study is vandalism of the SZ stickers--four participants reported theirs had been removed from their office doors. Nonetheless, those who displayed a sticker reported benefits of an ethical nature – pride, empowerment, and resolve. They believed the visibility of stickers had a positive impact on campus climate, or a neutral one at worst. In her 2002 study of a safe zone program, Evans found similar results. While some stickers at the University of Iowa had been defaced, faculty and staff felt their widespread display lent the campus a more progressive appearance. Participants felt good about being part of the program and those who were LGBTQ felt especially affirmed by the stickers.

It is interesting to note that the student participants in the current study did not share this view. While over half of the faculty/staff believe the stickers make students feel safer, the students themselves reported no such effect. Seeing a sticker did not make them more likely to come out to the person displaying it. This is a surprising contradiction which perhaps can be explained by the finding discussed above, in which some ally trainees proved unwilling to support the LGBTQ community. Possibly, students who have experienced or witnessed homophobia may harbor distrust of everyone until each is proven truly safe. Ally programs would be wise to heed this finding and exercise discretion in the distribution of SZ stickers. This

finding, combined with the negative reaction of some trainees as previously described, underscores the need to disqualify those who cannot commit to espousing affirmative values and beliefs. For the same reasons, other authors (Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg, 2002), are opposed to safe zone programs that do not require training and certification.

Additional Resources

Recommendation #6: Establish an officially-sponsored LGBTQ campus resource center.

Ally trainees were enthusiastic about recommending the training to colleagues and forthcoming about ways to improve it. Suggestions include: an abbreviated version for interested parties who cannot invest in two or three hours of training; better means of handling conflict in training sessions; and specialized modules on racism, sexism, religion, transgender, and legal issues. Trainees were also asked to recommend resources for improving the campus climate, and they overwhelmingly chose a professionally-staffed LGBTQ campus resource center. With such a center, the ally program could accomplish many of goals discussed above – promotion and marketing, a venue for allies and advocates to meet, targeted intervention for problematic departments, advanced and specialized training modules, and the judicious distribution of safe zone stickers. Campus resource centers are seen as essential in creating LGBTQ-welcoming environments, as claimed by Poynter and Tubbs (2007) and Ritchie and Banning (2001). Rankin also documented their benefits in her 2003 study: "As long as anti-GLBT bias persists on U.S. campuses, GLBT individuals will need spaces in which they may speak and act without fear of homophobic reprisal and such safe spaces should be institutionalized." (p. 45).

CONCLUSIONS

Findings of the current study echo the literature reporting on previous studies of campus climate and safe zone and ally programs. After five years of such efforts, it is apparent they are insufficient to make this particular university warm and welcoming for LGBTQ people. At best, campus climate has become a bit more tolerant, yet there remain pockets of ignorance and hostility. The establishment of an LGBTQ campus resource center would make a significant contribution toward improving conditions. While such centers help to make higher education safer and friendlier for LGBTQ students and employees, even they are not enough. All such efforts must be part of a larger institutional commitment, and that is the primary conclusion and recommendation of this study. Administrative support could connect the ally program to other campus departments and to on-going campus events so that people would perceive it as an integral part of campus life. It could also create an environment in which other campus organizations would join in challenging entrenched values such as heterosexual privilege, values that cannot be adequately addressed in a brief, one-shot training sessions. Administrative support might minimize hateful actions such as the destruction of safe zone stickers.

One participant in this study was asked during a job interview by a prospective employee: "I'm an open lesbian person and how is that on this campus?" The participant said "I had to think about that question because I said I can answer for me, I don't know if I can answer for the campus." With institutional commitment, an LGBTQ center, and on-going ally training, perhaps we could tell prospective employees and prospective students that this university is truly LGBTQ-friendly.

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APPENDICES

Ally/Safe Zone sticker at California State University, Northridge

Table 1: Campus Climate Perception by LGBTQ Students (N = 41)

Survey Question (n = for that one question = those that did not check 5 for cannot answer)	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Had instructor who held negative attitudes about students whom h/she thought were LGBTIQ (n = 37)	16% (6)	14% (5)	32% (12)	38% (14)
Had instructor who held negative attitudes toward me due to my LGBTIQ identity (n = 34)	6% (2)	12% (4)	30% (10)	53% (18)
Had an instructor who treated me unfairly due to his/her perception of my LGBTIQ identity (n = 34)	6% (2)	9% (3)	29% (10)	56% (19)
Have concealed my sexual/gender identity to avoid intimidation, harassment, or discrimination from students (n = 38)	16% (6)	40% (15)	24% (9)	21% (8)
Have concealed my sexual/gender identity from instructor, staff member, or administrator due to a fear of negative consequences, harassment, or discrimination (n = 36)	8% (3)	25% (9)	39% (14)	28% (10)
Know of students who, due to their perceived LGBTIQ identity, have experienced negative consequences, harassment, or discrimination from instructors, staff members or administrators (n = 35)	23% (8)	37% (13)	29% (10)	11% (4)

Table 2: Perception of Ally Training by LGBTQ Students (N = 41)

Survey Question (n = for that one question = those that did not select the response, "cannot answer")	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I know people at university who have undergone Ally training (n = 30)	27% (8)	20% (6)	17% (5)	37% (11)
I feel more comfortable about participating in classes where I know the instructor has undergone Ally training (n = 26)	39% (10)	42% (11)	12% (3)	8% (2)
I expect to be treated more fairly and equitably by someone who has an Ally sticker on her/his office door (n = 29)	48% (14)	31% (9)	17% (5)	3% (1)
I believe that Ally training/programs reduce anti-LGBTIQ bias in trainees (n = 26)	39% (10)	53% (14)	7% (2)	0%
Just because an instructor, staff member or administrator has had Ally training does not mean that I will experience less LGBTIQ bias from her or him (n = 31)	13% (4)	55% (17)	19% (6)	13% (4)
I would be more likely to come out to someone who has an Ally sticker posted in her/his office (n = 34)	35% (12)	41% (14)	9% (3)	15% (5)
I expect better awareness of LGBTIQ issues from people who have had the Ally training (n = 34)	47% (16)	44% (15)	6% (2)	3% (1)
I feel less secure/safe on campus, when I am near a posted Ally sticker (n = 29)	3% (1)	14% (4)	14% (4)	69% (20)
I have seen Ally stickers vandalized on campus (n = 21)	0% (0)	10% (2)	43% (9)	48% (10)
When I see an Ally sticker posted in someone's office, I feel less secure/safe disclosing personal information to her/him. (n = 27)	0%	7% (2)	30% (8)	63% (17)

Table 3: Impact of Ally Training and Stickers by Faculty/Staff (N = 19)

Survey Question (n = for that one question = those that did not check 5 for cannot answer)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students come to me to talk about LGBTIQQ issues since displaying Ally Sticker (n = 12)	0%	42% (5)	50% (6)	8% (1)
A negative incident occur to me since I began displaying the Ally Sticker that I believe is related to having the sticker displayed (n = 13)	0%	23% (3)	31% (4)	46% (6)
I have handled LGBTIQQ issues differently since I have attended the Ally training (n = 18)	28% (5)	56% (10)	11% (2)	5.6% (1)
I would recommend the Ally Training to my co-workers/colleagues/classmates (n = 19)	58% (11)	37% (7)	5% (1)	0%
I would recommend the Ally Training to my co-workers/colleagues/classmates only if training was changed (n = 14)	7% (1)	0%	50% (7)	43% (6)
The Ally training would be welcomed in my unit-department (n = 13)	54% (7)	47% (6)	0%	0%