

Co-Cultural Theory and Buff Allies

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Abstract

Co-Cultural theory examines the various methods co-cultures use to communicate with the dominate culture (Orbe, 1998a). Orbe theorized that co-cultures choose their communication approach based on their preferred outcome (Orbe, 1998a; Camara and Orbe, 2010). The main three methods include accommodation, separation, and assimilation. Co-cultures include any culture that is not considered dominate. This includes women, different ethnic groups, lower socioeconomic status groups, the LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, questioning, intersex, and asexual) community, etc. The article examines the LGBTQIA faculty and student support group, Buff Allies, at West Texas A&M University and the student body population's recognition of the club, possible engagement with the club, and co-cultural communication methods through using the C-T Scale by Herek (1984). The results showed that the tolerance level for varying gender and sexual identities is high at West Texas A&M University, most student don't recognize what Buff Allies is, the students want to be engaged through interactive meetings, and most students use accommodation to communicate with the dominant culture.

Introduction

In a study conducted by Gates (2011), it was discovered that there were approximately 9 million LGBTQIA Americans. This steadily growing population makes a large impact on society whether it be consumers and stockholders, or as voters and general citizens. Within legislation, states are currently stepping up to pass marriage equality laws. Um (2014) highlights the impending possibility to increase sales by slowly integrating LGBTQIA individuals into their advertisements. Schools are also taking notice and developing support groups and alliances to help LGBTQIA individuals feel comfortable and succeed. Lee (2002) cites, “gay and lesbian students are more likely than straight students to drop out of high school and also more likely to report that their schoolwork is being negatively affected by conflicts around their sexual orientation” (p. 21). Gay/Straight alliances create positive environments through a school which can help educate straight students and provide support to LGBTQIA students. West Texas A&M University (WT) is an example of a school that is developing their current faculty and staff organization, Buff Allies, which provides a safe environment for both LGBTQIA and straight students. The subsequent research study was conducted alongside West Texas A&M University’s Buff Allies advisors to understand their brand recognition, possible additions for student engagement, and the specific co-cultural theory strategies that are being used with their intolerance.

Literature Review

Standpoint Theory

The combination of related work from different feminist scholars during the 1990’s established standpoint theory. Harding and Wood, however, are credited for theorizing

standpoint theory (Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks, 2015). The theory states, “a specific societal positioning serves as a subjective vantage point from which persons interact with themselves and the world” (Orbe, 1998b, p.5). This theory argues that individual opinions and perspectives are shaped by the person’s previous social experiences and belonging to social groups. Standpoint theory presumes that underrepresented co-cultures have the ability to see dominant social institutions from an “out- sider-within” point of view (Collins, 1986; Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida, and Ogawa, 2005).). This objectivity allows co-cultures to recognize behaviors and norms that a dominant group may not be able to recognize (Collins, 1986).

Wood and Harding solidified standpoint theory from a feminist perspective. Wood (2005) believed the standpoint theory is useful to, “analyze how patriarchy naturalizes male and female divisions, making it seem natural, right, unremarkable that women are subordinate to men” (p. 61). Wood (2005) emphasized that unlike muted group theory, “standpoint theory does not focus on the language, it is focused on knowledge” (p.63). The theory also focuses on the experience of the individual being examined (Wood, 2005).

Muted Group Theory

Edwin Ardener developed the initial notion of women being a muted group, which enabled Cheris Kramarae of the University of Oregon to theorize muted group theory (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). According to Orbe (1998b), muted group theory, “suggests that in every society a social hierarchy exists that privileges some groups over others” (p.4). The theory publicizes the idea that language was constructed by dominant or privileged cultures and that it does not include the experiences of muted groups (Orbe, 1998b; Wood, 2005). Muted groups are defined by Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks (2015) as, “people belonging to low power groups who

must change their language when communicating publicly, thus, their ideas are often overlooked” (p.458).

Kramarae focused on the idea that language was developed predominately by white males, and that it excluded and silenced females’ voices and experiences (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). She also acknowledged there were a plethora of other muted groups within society (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). Mark Orbe developed the idea of muted group theory and applied it to other groups within society. Orbe considered, “people of color, women, gay/lesbians/bisexuals, and those from a lower socioeconomic status”, as muted groups as well (Orbe, 1998b; Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015).

Co-Cultural Theory

Orbe theorized co-cultural theory by taking Kramarae’s muted group theory and Harding and Wood’s standpoint theory by extending them to include all of the co-cultures that he believed were being silenced by the dominate culture within society (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). According to Orbe and Roberts (2012), “The origins of co-cultural theorizing [...] can be traced to a series of studies that explored how underrepresented group members communicate within dominant societal structures” (p.295). Orbe (1998a, 1998b) advocated for the use of the word co-culture instead of the more popular, sub-culture. This is because co-culture is significantly more neutral, and does not employ that any member of society is superior to another. Camara and Orbe (2010) stated that, “co-cultural theory has primarily been used to provide insight into the general approaches that various co-cultural group members take in negotiating their societal positioning in organizations” (p. 86).

According to Orbe's (1998a) co-cultural theory, the LGBTQIA community is considered a co-culture due to their differences in opinion, which are generally outlying from the ethical code that is accepted by the dominate culture. These ethical differences cause LGBTQIA persons to suffer from exclusion and persecution. Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling, and Parker (2012) claim, "oppression is manifest through individual and institutional prejudice that favors other sex-sexuality (heterosexism) or verbalized ideological thought that normalizes and presumes heterosexuality is the only norm" (p. 313). Kama (2002) acknowledged, "many gay men feel that they are relegated to a liminal or in-between ontological position. They wish to abandon the abnormal periphery, yet are not accepted as full members of society" (p. 207). Therefore, LGBTQIA individuals are forced to find an unorthodox method to communicate and manage the everyday situations with the dominant culture (Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling, and Parker, 2012).

Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling, and Parker (2012) explored co-cultural theory in order to increase ones' understanding of how lower-represented groups (LGBTQIA) negotiate their social position in the world when interacting with the dominant group members. Co-cultural theory assumes that the dominant group, who are considered heterosexual individuals, are more privileged and sanctified than those in the non-dominant groups. Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling, and Parker (2012) examined 96 stories of sexual discrimination using the outline of co-cultural theory for analysis. Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling, and Parker (2012) used qualitative content to explore how individuals respond to perceived acts of heterosexism during interpersonal interactions. They used quantitative to determine the

frequency of strategic responses. Out of the 96 respondents, the majority reported they were discriminated against and treated differently because of their sexuality.

Cohen and Avanzino (2010) clarified, “the premise of co-cultural theory is that, though they have diverse lived experiences, underrepresented people share the status of feeling marginalized in society and use a variety of communication ‘orientations’ when they interact with dominant group members” (p. 277). Lapinski and Orbe (2007) stated, “in order to negotiate within the dominant culture and achieve any measure of success, co-cultural group members will adopt certain communication orientations in their everyday interactions” (p. 138). Camara and Orbe (2010) defined communication orientation as the specific stance that co-cultural group members assume within everyday interactions they participate in. Orbe (1998a) and Camara and Orbe (2010) outline the idea that communication orientation is influenced principally by communication approach and preferred outcome. Communication orientation is also impacted marginally by field of experience, perceived costs and rewards, capability, and situational context (Orbe, 1998a; Camara and Orbe, 2010). When co-cultures communicate with dominant cultures, they often use a specific or a variety of strategies to handle the situation because they are not properly represented within society. Orbe (1998a) stated, “the ability to employ certain practices, and in turn specific co-cultural orientations, will vary depending on the situational context and the perceived costs and rewards associated with each strategy” (p. 119). Orbe hypothesized three common methods that co-cultures utilize when communicating with the dominant culture: assimilation, separation, and accommodation (Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks, 2015; Lapinski and Orbe, 2007; Orbe, 1998a; Orbe 1998b).

Assimilation

According to Camara and Orbe (2010), “assimilation involves attempts to fit with the dominant cultural norms, eliminates cultural differences and minimizes distinctions between groups” (p. 87). One uses assimilation to avoid conflicts by discarding individualistic qualities and assuming those of the main dominant culture. Assimilation is when the co-culture takes on the dominate cultures perspectives in order to avoid conflict. By guarding what one says, the person assimilates to the dominant culture (Congdon, 2014).

Types of assimilation strategies include nonassertive assimilation and aggressive assimilation. According to Groscurth and Orbe (2004) nonassertive assimilation is, “avoiding discussions (censoring self) that would have given attention to differences in their family education levels” (p. 44). Aggressive assimilation refers to, “taking a determined stance to be seen as one of the dominant group members” (Congdon, 2014, p. 14).

Separation

Weathers and Hopson (2015) stated, “separation is the intentional act to limit or omit communication with dominant group members” (P. 107). Co-cultures use separation as a coping method when communicating with dominant members of society. Glen and Johnson (2012) stated the methods of separation include, “avoiding, preventing interactions with members of the dominant social group” (p. 358). When utilizing this strategy, co-cultural individuals disassociate from others. Separation is essentially the withdrawal from conflict individuals from co-cultures experience when they feel uncomfortable with dominating viewpoints.

In most cases, separation is considered a physical absence strategy (Orbe, 1998b; Weathers and Hopson, 2015). Separation is an act that occurs externally rather than internally. A visible aversion takes place in reaction to the feeling of being unrepresented. It is more tangible than

avoiding controversy (Orbe, 1998b; Weathers and Hopson, 2015). Separation is tangible because it is a bodily reaction. Separation is also an emotional response, however, Orbe (1998b) found the physical reactions to be the true responses of co-cultural individuals. Co-cultural individuals physically disassociate from dominate cultures during conflict because they feel underrepresented and simply don't believe they will be acknowledged (Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida, and Ogawa, 2005).

Camara and Orbe (2010) proclaimed, "Separation involves the creation and maintenance of a group identity distinct from that of the dominant culture" (p. 88). When an individual chooses to cope with conflict by use of separation, they are in turn choosing to be different than the majority. This difference is easily recognizable because separation causes distance between individuals mentally and physically. By separating, co-cultures can choose to avoid any negativity and stick to their individual beliefs. Separation is maintained through distance and avoidance. Although it can help individuals relieve stress, it may not solve the actual conflict.

Accommodation

Research has elucidated that, "Accommodation is a preference on the part of co-cultural group members for changing the existing structures and development of appreciation for the various cultural perspectives of those involved in an interaction" (Camara and Orbe, 2010, p. 87- 88; Lapinski and Orbe, 2007, p.140). Accommodation is the communication method in which co-cultural groups or individuals attempt to essentially persuade the dominate group into understanding or believing their point of view. The goal of accommodation is to adapt others opinions or to adjust others into accepting that there are different possible ways of looking at one problem.

Accommodation can be seen as the most difficult of all the co-cultural communication methods. It requires an individual to stand against what the majority believes. Castle Bell, Hopson, Weathers, and Ross (2015) identified accommodation as staying true to one's self and their individual beliefs and morals. Once someone of a co-culture decides to use accommodation as their communication method following conflict, the situation can either be elevated or alleviated.

Integrating co-cultural theory with Buff allies

Co-cultural theory would define Buff Allies target audience as a co-culture. In this respect, their audience would utilize assimilation, separation, and/or accommodation as means to communicate with the dominate culture at West Texas A&M University. Understanding Buff Allies current voice within the university campus will enable them to better brand themselves to be more inclusive and to gain more recognition throughout the campus. Deciphering the communication methods within West Texas A&M University will help Buff Allies develop better advertising campaigns and a greater rapport on campus.

Research Questions

The authors conducted research to discover whether West Texas A&M students recognize who the organization is and possible opportunities to engage students. Research determined that co-cultural theory could be applied to the organization and discover various communication methods used by students in order to suggest more appropriate means of communication between the organization and their target audience. The following research questions were examined by the researchers in effort to help Buff Allies increase their recognition and engage students.

RQ1: Do West Texas A&M University students recognize what Buff Allies is?

RQ2: How can Buff Allies engage students at West Texas A&M University?

RQ3: Are specific co-cultural theory strategies (assimilation, accommodation, and separation) being used between West Texas A&M University students in order to cope with their intolerance? If so, what are the most commonly used ones?

Method

The authors analyzed surveys and focus group responses to develop data. Co-cultural theory was utilized to create an online survey using Qualtrics Survey Software and sent using mass emails to students currently enrolled at West Texas A&M University during the spring 2015 semester. The survey gained knowledge regarding brand recognition, suggestions for student engagement, and the specific co-cultural theory strategies that are being used between West Texas A&M University students. The results for the survey data ranges between the +/- 5% and +/- 3% confidence level. Also, an in-person focus group protocol was conducted to interpret the research from the survey. The subsequent segment clarifies features of the participants involved, research procedures, and data analysis.

Participants

Students ages 18 and older who attend West Texas A&M University were requested to participate in this online survey. Both males and females participated in the survey in order to obtain the necessary data. The total population of the demographics being examined was approximately 8,900 with females accounting for roughly 56% of the overall population (N= 8,981). 25.2 was the average age of the campus' population. The total survey sample consisted of a total of 470 responses with females accounting for roughly 61%, males accounting for 37%, other accounting for 1%, and trans* accounting for .04% (n= 470). The age ranges consisted of

68% of 18-25 year olds, 17% of 26-34 year olds, 10% of 35-44 year olds, 4% of 45-54 year olds, and 1% of 55-64 year olds.

Research Procedures

The survey was measured using Herek's (1984) Condemnation-Tolerance (C-T) Scale and interpreted using Orbe's co-cultural theory. The C-T scale has been tested for accuracy. On a scale where .7 is considered reliable, the C-T scale received a .86. Therefore, the C-T scale is a reliable method for obtaining data. Students were asked to convey their agreement with different statements on a 7-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. This data revealed the tolerance levels of students enrolled at West Texas A&M University and their avoidance techniques when dealing with conflict. Other information that was measured includes brand recognition of Buff Allies, student's desires for possible engagement, and suggestions for what the organization could do in order to help increase student awareness.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through entry into SPSS. Data was obtained from survey responses and focus groups of enrolled West Texas A&M University students.

Results

Participants who responded that they do not separate or assimilate also responded that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students are an important part of diversity at WT. The participants also responded that lesbian, gay, bisexual students, and transgender should talk about their sexual orientation on campus. Results also proved that if a participant responded that they accommodate, they were more likely to view the LGBTQIA community in a positive light. Finally, the responses between Christians and Atheist were significantly different. Respondents

who identified as Christian were more inclined to disagree that the LGBTQIA community is an important part of West Texas A&M's diversity and more inclined to agree that the LGBTQIA community should not talk about their sexual or gender identity.

Tolerance Results

According to the survey conducted on the student body, 39.46% strongly disagreed with the statement that the increasing acceptance of gay men and lesbians in our society are aiding in the deterioration of morals while 17.51% strongly agreed. An overwhelming 44.78% strongly disagree that gay men and lesbians endanger the institution of the family. 36.72% strongly believe gay and lesbians are moral and ethical people, while 23.89% were indecisive and 4.64% strongly disagreed. 29.64% neither agreed nor disagreed with the ethical and morality statement in support of transgender people. 44.69% of the 452 strongly support adoption equality. 17.73% of the 451 individuals strongly support the idea to deny marriage equality for same-sex couples. On the opposite end of the spectrum, more than double, 44.34% strongly opposed the right to deny marriage equality to same-sex couples. 22.34% of the individuals in the survey neither agreed nor disagreed with loosening state laws and regulating private and consenting homosexual behavior while 34.53% strongly agreed and 20.09% agreed. 47.19% strongly disagree with the statement in support of gay and lesbians not fitting into society. Only 21 (4.71%) out of the 445 individuals who answered this question strongly supportive this statement. In regards to trans-gender individuals being an unacceptable part of society, 180 (40.44%) out 445 people strongly oppose while 31 (6.96%) strongly agree. 44.26% of the individuals strongly oppose psychological treatment for homosexuals while 18.20% neither agree or disagree and 9.21% strongly agree. 96 (21.52%) of the total 446 strongly agree that

same sex behavior, two men or two women is simply wrong. The results show that more than double (41.70%) strongly disagree with this statement. 10.65% strongly believe lesbian, gay, and bisexual students should not talk about their sexual orientation on campus, 77.0% agreed, 24.48% disagree and 37.41% out of the 441 individuals strongly disagreed. 11.33% strongly believe trans-gender students should not openly disclose their gender identity on campus, 8.84% agree while 24.48% disagree and 36.96% strongly disagree. And finally, 165 (37.41%) of the 441 total strongly agree that lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender students are important to the question of whether lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender students are a valuable part to the diversity of WT, 21.54% neither agree nor disagree and 11.79% strong disagree.

Discussion

Participants who claimed accommodation was their primary method to communicate with the dominate culture were significantly more likely to be tolerant of the LGBTQIA community. This is most likely because as accommodators, they desire to change others minds or at least prove others with a general understanding that there are many opinions on every topic. One could infer that due to their religious teachings, Christian respondents were less tolerant of the LGBTQIA community at West Texas A&M.

Research Question One

Do West Texas A&M University students recognize what Buff Allies is?

When asked if students recognized who Buff Allies were, 32% of 439 respondents answered yes and 68% answered no. Students were also asked how they recognized Buff Allies; 127 said they had seen their logo, 77 said they had taken a class with a Buff Allies professor, 68 said they had seen the section in their syllabus about the organization, 6 said they are a Buff Ally, 7 said they

are a member of spectrum, 334 said this survey, and 38 said other. The other responses included: they had heard of the training, peer discussion, their friends are Buff Allies, the Buff Allies website, and they have heard about it within another organizations presentation. 32% of 436 respondents recognized Buff Allies logo. Out of the 436 respondents, 64% did not recognize any of the images that were provided within the survey.

The majority (6/7) focus group participants did not know who Buff Allies was. One individual in particular stated that the image of the buffalo and rainbow was visible on campus.

It is evident that majority of the students who participated in the survey did not identify with Buff Allies or recognize the brand. Many students had seen the logo around campus, however they did not understand what Buff Allies is. Furthermore, Buff Allies should better advertise their brand to broaden student awareness.

Research Question Two

How can Buff Allies engage students at West Texas A&M University?

65% out of 167 respondents stated that they would attend luncheons, 24% stated they would attend dances, 68% said they would attend educational seminars, 78% stated that they would attend meetings with guest speakers, 46% stated that they would attend game nights, 66% would attend lectures, 39% said they would attend safe-zone training, 36% stated they would attend LGBTQIA community and religion meetings, and 6% gave other responses. The other sections listed suggestions including: singles meetings, support groups, events that include family and friends, debates, hikes, dinners, reinforce meet and greets, and awareness center in the JBK. Focus group members (3/7) stated that they would attend a Buff Allies meeting if they were supporting their friend or family member. Some suggested events from focus group members

include spoken word, anything that included free food, a 3-legged race, and anything that occurs during the freshman seminar. 2 focus group members suggested that Buff Allies organize competitive intramurals or sporting events to get individuals involved.

The survey data and focus group suggestions imply that students would like to attend more personalized and interactive events. Instead of sitting and talking, students want to be able to get up and work together. Students are also interested in events that involve food and famous or controversial speakers that would captivate their attention.

Research Question Three

Are specific co-cultural theory strategies (assimilation, accommodation, and separation) being used between West Texas A&M University students in order to cope with their intolerance? If so, what are the most commonly used ones?



Accommodation is the most commonly used communication method to interact with the dominate culture at West Texas A&M University. 37% of the respondents strongly agree they would use accommodation and 95% agree they would use accommodation in metaphorical situations. Separation was the second most popular response with significantly less who strongly agree and agree. 1% of the 439 respondents who answered strongly agree would utilize separation in reaction to a metaphorical communication situations with the dominate culture, and 30% who agree would use separation in the same situation. West Texas A&M students responses proved that they would least likely use assimilation in interactions with the dominate culture. 84% of respondents stated they disagree and wouldn't use assimilation and 44% strongly disagreed with the same scenarios.

Focus group responses also indicated that accommodation would be used more than assimilation and separation. Focus group participants stated that they would stand up for something they believe if they have a good argument to state. However, it depends on how confrontational the individual or group they are conversing with is. Another focus group participant stated that whether they would verbally stand up for their opinion or not, would depend on if they believe their voice is necessary in the matter. For example, they would speak up if not speaking up meant hurting another, but they would not speak up if the issue was non-detrimental.

The data explains that accommodation is utilized at West Texas A&M University. Therefore, students at this university will stand up for their opinions with the goal of changing others minds, or at least getting them to understand that there are other possible opinions on any given matter. The focus group explains why West Texas A&M students chose accommodation as

their primary communication method when discussing with the dominate culture. The focus group explained that accommodation is what individuals would like to use. However, they may not always use it. Whether they choose to or not really depends on the scenario and importance of the situation.

Survey and Focus Group Suggestions

Survey data from 263 and focus group data from 7 West Texas A&M University students suggests that Buff Allies complete the following suggestions in order to increase student awareness:

- Hang posters across the university campus
 - Hold a celebratory parade
 - Further advertise their goals and purpose
 - Hold social meet and greets
 - Have professors spread the word through emails, flyers, social media, etc.
 - Create and play university commercials
 - Post in the school newspaper
 - Hold information sessions
 - Send out a mass email to all students saying who the organization is and what they wish to accomplish
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- Hold more events that would appeal to everyone
 - Sponsor a pride event on campus or in Canyon or Amarillo
 - Create a booth in the JBK and pass out flyers
 - Organize and engage in public debate for political equality

- Host a debate with religious and LGBTQIA speakers

Limitations

A survey was conducted to gain insight into the LGBTQIA community at West Texas A&M University. As research persisted, revisions arose. While reviewing the data through SPSS, it was evident that the survey was not taken seriously. There were only one hundred responses on the open-ended question. The students were also not given specific scenarios in the survey or focus group questions to better explain how accommodation, assimilation, and separation occur. For example, the survey asked whether students disassociated with those they didn't agree with instead of asking whether they disassociated with those who advocate that being gay or lesbian is wrong, if they believe otherwise. Certain questions were answered with statements that did not pertain to the research. Therefore, making that information non-viable. Particular questions could have been worded in a different manner in which they were not seen as offensive. For example, there was a question regarding the moral judgment of an LGBTQIA individual as opposed to that of a heterosexual individual which was seen as offensive. Moreover, there were questions that were not asked such as those regarding the student's area of study. By changing the errors above, the clarity of the data would have improved and the survey would have been taken in a more serious manner.

Suggestions for Buff Allies

The authors researched which communication methods West Texas A&M University students use in order to suggest possible modifications in the way that Buff Allies presents themselves on campus. The authors calculated that according to their survey and focus group results, most West Texas A&M University students claim they communicate using accommodation when they are

considered the co-cultural group. Separation was the second most claimed communication method, followed by assimilation. However, both chosen were significantly less than accommodation. In order to reach students who communicate using assimilation the authors suggest the use of advertising methods that are popular at the time. For example, the use of humorous graphics, viral videos, and social media campaigns. Testimonies, celebrity and humanitarian endorsements, and food would better engage those who utilize assimilation. In order for Buff Allies to effectively reach students who choose to separate, Buff Allies could hold personal meetings with students. For example, create their meetings based on a theme that would appear to different social groups within the school and create a safe and personal environment. Buff Allies could also hold their meetings at different venues (or within different departments of the university) and/or speak to a variety of different clubs individually to reach co-cultures who separate from the dominate culture. When communicating with students who use accommodation, it is suggested by the researchers that Buff Allies provide services that allow students of all backgrounds and faiths to hear different perspectives on the subject of the LGBTQIA community. Possible events that Buff Allies could use in order to appeal to students who use accommodation include holding informative seminars, debates, and/or hosting family and friend support and educational meetings. For example, Buff Allies could have religious speakers come in and address the students and/or allow family members and friends to come to a meeting that will educate them and help support them as well.

By utilizing co-cultural theory to understand how underrepresented groups communicate with the dominate culture, Buff Allies may greater understand the tolerance level between the different students of West Texas A&M University in order to evaluate their overall success in

serving their goal of creating campus safety and inclusivity. By use of the C-T scale, researchers evaluated the tolerance level of West Texas A&M students. This information brought insight to explain the anonymity used by some students because of possible fear of intolerance. The overall tolerance level on the West Texas A&M University campus was relatively high. However two questions from the survey contradicted the high tolerance level. First, 21.52% strongly agreed with the statement regarding same-sex behavior whether between two men or two women is just plain wrong. This number was slightly over half of the individuals who responded that they strongly disagree that same-sex behavior whether between two men or two women is just plain wrong (41% indicated high tolerance for same sex behavior). Secondly, the question asking whether lesbian, gay, and bisexual students shouldn't talk about their sexual orientation on campus was also contradicted. The largest percentage of respondents (77.099%) agreed that they shouldn't talk about their sexual orientation on campus. Buff Allies may use this information to develop clearer advertising and as a guideline to understanding student's intolerance and attempt to increase the tolerance. Or as a focus group member stated, Buff Allies could use this information about student's tolerance levels to remain relatively anonymous to protect students from feeling threatened in anyway by intolerance.

Conclusion

The authors examined West Texas A&M University students through a survey and focus group in order to answer three research questions; RQ1: Do West Texas A&M University students recognize what Buff Allies is?; RQ2: How can Buff Allies engage students at West Texas A&M University?; RQ3: Are specific co-cultural theory strategies (assimilation, accommodation, and separation) being used between West Texas A&M University students in order to cope with their

intolerance? If so, what are the most commonly used ones? The survey results were measured using Herek's (1984) Condemnation-Tolerance (C-T) Scale and interpreted through the lens of Orbe's co-cultural theory. The importance of the research was to examine campus recognition of the Buff Allies group and to identify and understand which strategies could benefit the group's growth. Results reiterated the idea that religious and political affiliations have an effect on how individuals perceive the LGBTQIA community. The research brought to light that there may be no correlation between the perception of LGBTQIA organizations and the way the participants responding to questions about them identify.

The idea that everyone communicates based on their experiences and in some rights, level of respect and tolerance from the rest of the world was initially brought up within Standpoint theory. Standpoint theory states, "a specific societal positioning serves as a subjective vantage point from which persons interact with themselves and the world" (Orbe, 1998b, p.5). Muted group theory, which is similar to standpoint theory, "suggests that in every society a social hierarchy exists that privileges some groups over others" (Orbe, 1998b, p.4). Muted group theory also acknowledges that language was created by dominant or privileged cultures, therefore it does not include the experiences of muted groups (Orbe, 1998b; Wood, 2005). According to Orbe's (1998a) co-cultural theory, the LGBTQIA community is considered a co-culture due to their differences in opinion and ethical code. Therefore, LGBTQIA individuals are forced to find an unorthodox method of communication to manage everyday situations with the dominant culture (Camara, Katznelson, Hildebrandt-Sterling, and Parker, 2012). Cohen and Avanzino (2010) believed "underrepresented people share the status of feeling marginalized in society and use a variety of communication 'orientations' when they interact with dominant group members"

(p 277). Orbe (2010) stated, communication orientation is influenced principally by communication approach and preferred outcome and that there are three common methods that co-cultures utilize when communicating with the dominate culture: assimilation, separation, and accommodation (Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks, 2015; Lapinski and Orbe, 2007; Orbe, 1998a; Orbe 1998b). Understanding the communication methods used by co-cultures can help Buff Allies communicate better with their target demographic.

Implications for Future Inquiry

The results prove that West Texas A&M University was impacted as a whole by the study. Recognition of Buff Allies on campus was discovered, exposing the low percentage of students who knew about the organization. This impacts the organization by proving they need to advertise and market in order to create a rapport with students. Possible means of engagement between the organization and students were suggested. These suggestions influence the organization by aiding them in developing new ways to interact with their target demographic. Communication methods that students use were discovered and explained. The significance of this data suggest techniques to reach various demographics of West Texas A&M. The study could also be replicated and the suggestions could be beneficial to other, similar organizations. Future research should be conducted with individual organizations to provide a 'safe place' for students. Further investigation into student support for and participation with Buff Allies could benefit the organization to confirm the results of this study. The results of this research study suggest that the following be considered for topics of future research:

- Researching administrator and professor support of the organization

- Analyzing the different types of events and quantity of individuals that attend to understand which events are most successful for the organization
- Researching the attitudes and perceived tolerance level on campus by specifically targeting the students and professors in both the Gay Straight Alliance on campus (Spectrum) and Buff Allies.

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