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Connecting to Get Things Done: A Conceptual Model of the Process Used to Respond to Bias Incidents

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In this study, we interviewed victims of bias incidents and members of a bias response team to investigate the process the team used to respond to incidents. Incidents included acts of sexism, homophobia, and racism on a large, predominantly White research university in the Midwest. Data were analyzed using a 4-stage coding process. The emergent model focused on the way the bias response team members connected to students, other team members, and colleagues from across campus to respond to the bias incidents. Important tensions that team members navigate also became evident and are depicted in the model. Findings from this study inform practice by illuminating the complexity of how educators carry out social justice work on a campus. Furthermore, this study expands diversity scholarship by examining the intersection between individuals, campus climate, and their environment.

Keywords: bias incident, social justice, diversity, campus climate, student affairs

Bias-related incidents are defined as “diversity-related conflict,” “acts of ignorance or hate,” and “a breach of trust for an individual or community harmed by a pervasive and hostile climate” (Schrage & Giacomini, 2009, p. 14). These conflicts are based on gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, and religion, and occur in both curricular and cocurricular environments (Boysen, Vogel, Cope, & Hubbard, 2009; Reason & Rankin, 2005; Renn, 2010; Schrage

& Giacomini, 2009). Unfortunately, minoritized students are victimized by bias-related incidents such as racially themed parties, graffiti on residence hall wipe boards, and sexist and/or homophobic slurs all too often in college and university environments (Anthony & Johnson, 2012; Johnston & Garcia, 2014; Hughes, 2013). We use the term *minoritized students* instead of the terms *minority students* or *underrepresented students* because of our agreement with and adaptation of Harper’s (2012) assessment that *minoritized* better signifies “the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in U.S. social institutions, including colleges and universities” (p. 9).¹ Student affairs profession-

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¹ “Persons are not born into a minority status nor are they minoritized in every social context (e.g., their families, racially homogeneous friendship groups, or places of worship). Instead, they are rendered minorities in particular situations and institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation of Whiteness [and other hegemonic forces that oppress certain social identities (e.g., homophobia, religious intolerance, sexism, etc.)]” (p. 9).

als in student conduct, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, and researchers and policymakers have generated formal and informal professional standards for campus educators (i.e., administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals) to refer to when bias-related incidents occur (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, 2003; Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis, 2014). These guidelines offer suggestions for campus educators to align practices for responding to bias-related incidents with values related to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and comply with federal laws and regulations (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, 2003; Worthington et al., 2014). Subsequently, bias response teams (BRTs) have proliferated across the country on college campuses in direct response to the formal and informal calls for protocols and procedures from governing bodies (Anthony & Johnson, 2012; Hughes, 2013).²

A BRT brings together campus educators to address reported incidents of bias experienced by students, staff, or faculty on a campus. Yet, minimal empirical evidence exists about the process campus educators who oversee or enact these teams employ. Researchers and administrators call for practice, especially related to social justice and diversity, to be informed by scholarly research and vice versa (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009). Thus, this lack of research is problematic because of the unexamined dynamics related to how campus educators consider their own identities, negotiate team dynamics, and strive for organizational change when responding to bias-related incidents. For this reason, this grounded theory study investigated the process that one BRT uses to address incidents of bias. This study is necessary because increasing the field's understanding of a BRT will provide opportunities to better situate how a BRT contributes to positive campus climates and how policies and procedures can be best structured to support a BRT. Because we employed constructivist grounded theory methodology, we drew on the literature related to policies and procedures for responding to bias-related incidents and positive campus climate for diverse students and campus educators as sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2006).

Recommended Policies and Procedures for Addressing Bias-Related Incidents

Organizing bodies related to the U.S. Department of Justice, student conduct, and the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education are clear about an institution's responsibilities to comply with federal laws related to addressing hate crimes and harassment (e.g., due process for hearings, Clery Act, Title IX; Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, 2003; Worthington et al., 2014). The U.S. Department of Justice (n.d.) defines a hate crime as "violence of intolerance and bigotry, intended to hurt and intimidate someone because of their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or disability" (para. 1). Schools or colleges rank third among locations where hate crimes take place (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011). Campus educators and students often refer bias-related incidents or hate incidents (i.e., reactive, impulsive, and premeditated) to student conduct administrators if the accused is perceived to be in violation of policies outlined in an institution's student code of conduct but does not rise to the level of a hate crime (e.g., harassment, vandalism; Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, 2003). Most institutions have formal student conduct and punitive processes to respond to hate crimes; however, less serious incidents of bias may still cause the victim to feel physically and psychologically unsafe. This concern is why institutions generate alternative response mechanisms such as victim assistance resources and BRTs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, 2003).

For example, some institutions have formed behavioral threat and assessment teams in the wake of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting to respond to students who might be at risk of harming themselves or others due to mental

² Internet searches for *bias response teams* on October 30, 2012, by Hughes (2013) and the current authors on March 25, 2015, generated hundreds of diverse colleges and universities employing BRTs such as University of Chicago, University of Oregon, Vassar, University of Rhode Island, Ball State University, The Ohio State University, Saint Mary's College, Southern Oregon University, University of Texas at Austin, Lafayette College, Juniata College, and Fairfield College.

health issues or other stressors (Fox & Savage, 2009). Traditionally, these teams do not provide educational programs, nor are they exclusively concerned with the prevention of bias incidents or improving campus climate (Dunkle, Silverstein, & Warner, 2008; Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2010). In addition, Schlosser and Sedlacek (2001) offered suggestions for constructing critical incident teams on college campuses to address hate crimes from a proactive construct. Their three-pronged approach includes (a) evaluating or putting the incident in the context of what is happening on a college campus by reviewing archived materials such as student newspapers, (b) understanding or gathering information about the incident, and (c) dealing with the incident by constructing ongoing dialogues and workshops with members of the respective community (Schlosser & Sedlacek, 2001).

These established institutional levers are useful, but are not empirically based on how particular BRTs operate and take into consideration the individual characteristics and team dynamics of its members. Organizing bodies are calling on campus educators to be responsive to bias incidents on college campuses and connect those responses to ultimately improving campus climate for diverse students, faculty, and staff (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2001, 2003; Worthington et al., 2014). Thus, it is important to draw attention to theoretical constructs to consider how BRT initiatives may enhance positive campus climate for diverse learning environments.

Conceptual Framework: BRTs in Relation to Cultivating Diverse Learning Environments

The multicontextual mode for diverse learning environments (DLEs) is a theoretical framework that examines the intersection of the individual, organizational, and institutional levels in relation to campus climate for diversity (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). The creators of the DLE model suggested that the model “may help to identify other converging areas of scholarship that influence practice and/or lead to greater awareness about actors’ roles as institutional agents (i.e. campus educators) who determine student success (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and/or the repro-

duction of inequality” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 63). This study takes a particular context, BRTs, to investigate how campus educators respond to incidents of bias on a college campus. Aspects of the DLE are relevant to investigating how a BRT operates because the theory sits at the nexus of how campus educators have the capacity to influence the institutional dimensions of creating DLEs. This framework suggests that campus educators need to consider their multiple identities in relation to initiatives they enact and how those initiatives can contribute to creating a positive DLE for students to thrive (Hurtado et al., 2012).

Thus, the DLE model is an appropriate conceptual framework for this study for two additional reasons. First, we made an intentional effort to reflect the broadening definition of diversity. Whereas the early work on campus climate has focused almost exclusively on race and ethnicity (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen, & Milem, 1998; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999), the new model “is intended to reflect inclusion of the developing scholarship on multiple social identity groups” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 48). Similarly, the BRT in our study was not limited to responding to racial bias incidents only. This study illustrates how institutional responses are structured to be effective (or not) for a range of social identities that experience acts of bias differently but require similar institutional support.

Second, the creators of the DLE model argued that the educational outcomes of DLEs (e.g., skills for lifelong learning and multicultural competency) are engendered via both the curriculum and cocurriculum. For the cocurriculum in this study, the model focuses on the “interaction of staff identities with student identities, programming for design of content, and practices centered on student development” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 81). The DLE is a framework that encompasses scholarship related to “climate, practices, and outcomes” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 101); the authors suggested that theory development is needed to address the intersection of these tenets. With respect to the extensive body of work on climate and outcomes, this study focused on the practice aspect of the DLE in hopes of adding nuance to the DLE framework by illuminating how practices such as the BRT inform campus climate and lead to the educationally beneficial campus

that campus educators desire on a macrolevel. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand the process participants use to address incidents of bias that students face. Furthermore, this study was situated within a particular context related to the following question: How do campus educators who encompass a BRT operate toward organizational change (or not)? The conceptual framework used for this study was not imposed on the data. Rather, sensitizing concepts informed the design of our interview protocols and enhanced our interpretations of the participants' work with the BRT. These practices enhanced our theoretical sensitivity, consistent with designing a constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2006).

Method

In this study, we employed constructivist epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and grounded theory methodology because the study focused on the process used by a BRT (Charmaz, 2006). According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), constructivism assumes that both researcher and participants together construct multiple, complex, and somewhat indeterminate realities. As a research team, we were keenly interested in the coconstructed reality created by the participants and subsequently interpreted by our research team in relation to addressing bias incidents on college campuses (Charmaz, 2006). We chose constructivist grounded theory methodology as the methodological approach to data collection and analysis because of the emphasis on generating theory from data (Charmaz, 2006). Building on more objectivist perspectives of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), Charmaz (2006) offers more flexible guidelines for coding and analyzing data.

Researcher Positionality

The primary investigator focused initial meetings with the team of 11 researchers on examining the constructivist epistemological approach, grounded theory methodology, and reflecting on researcher positionalities (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). We are diverse in regards to social identities such as, but not limited to, race and gender but also in regard to experiences working with BRT approaches as

student affairs practitioners. Thus, we examined how both dominant and marginalized identities may influence the way(s) one interprets the data and how researchers strive to establish rapport with participants with similar or different social identities (Jones et al., 2013). All research team members conducted interviews and participated in early stages of data analysis. Four research team members and the primary investigator continued the study at the point of axial coding.

Research Setting

Violet University (pseudonym) is a large, predominantly White research university in the Midwest. There are between 30,000 and 50,000 enrolled students hailing from different regions in the United States and a growing international student population. The publicized mission of the BRT is to support student success when someone experiences hate or bias. Members of the BRT espouse that Violet is committed to ending discrimination on campus. Gloria (pseudonym), one senior-level administrator in student affairs, oversees the BRT and reports direction to the chief student affairs officer. Administrators in student affairs, faculty members, and graduate students staff the BRT on a volunteer basis. Current members invite staff or students to join when a vacancy occurs; there are no term limits for members and current members have served between 1 and more than 15 years. Although there is no formal training or orientation process, there is an annual retreat that team members attend to review the previous year's cases.

There are four subcommittees of approximately six members each. The subcommittees recognize that identities are intersectional in nature, but each group focuses attention on incidents primarily related to (a) disability, (b) sexual orientation, (c) gender, or (d) racial and/or religious-related incidents. BRT members describe bias incidents as anything related to personal verbal attacks, graffiti, threatening behavior, classroom concerns, and policy-supported discrimination. The subcommittees meet weekly to review reports that students, faculty, or staff file by e-mail, phone, or mobile application. In the online reporting system, victims are informed that the information is kept confidential. Because the student, faculty, or staff member is responsible for reporting an

incident of bias, this process is victim-driven. Although the BRT is separate from the student conduct process at Violet, it is possible that a bias-related incident filed with the BRT is also filed with student conduct. The findings from this study describe what happens after a victim or third party files a report.

Participants

For this study, we used purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling to recruit participants (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014). The primary investigator first contacted Gloria to discuss the study and ask her to suggest participants who could provide information-rich data about the process used by the BRT (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2014). Because this study focused on the process used to respond to an incident of bias at Violet, primary research participants were members of the BRT. We asked Gloria to suggest incidents that occurred within the past several years in contexts such as residence halls or classroom settings. These types of incidents involved more than a singular victim and complainant and were not currently under review by the BRT.

Gloria first contacted about 30 potential participants to inquire about participation in the study and, if they were interested, the contact information was given to the primary investiga-

tor. Two participants were added as data collection progressed because participants recommended individuals who could speak to the formation of the BRT; this process of snowball and theoretical sampling was used to further our analysis with saturating the categories in the emerging process (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). See Table 1 for additional information about participants. The final sample consisted of 16 participants from three cases related to incidents of bias due to racism, heterosexism, sexism, and/or religious oppression. To preserve confidentiality of the victims' experience with bias, we chose not to provide a detailed description of the bias incidents around which participants engaged their work. However, we provide a general description of the cases and participants involved in Table 2.

Data Collection

We gathered information from participants using a series of two, semistructured, 60-min individual interviews in Spring 2013, resulting in 32 total interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005). We designed interview protocols but also asked probing questions to elicit in-depth responses (Fontana & Frey, 2005) focusing on how participants make meaning of terms such as *diversity* and *equity*, the process used to address the particular bias incident, participants' roles in

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Race	Gender	Religion	Socioeconomic status	Role
Allan	White	Transgender man	Atheist	Middle	Victim, student
AllyD	White	Man	Christian	Upper middle	BRT member
Calvin	White	Man	Christian	Middle	BRT member
Chris	White	Man	Spiritualist	Middle	BRT member
Crimson	White	Woman	— ^a	Middle	BRT member
Dyas	Biracial	Man	Spiritual	Middle	BRT member
Eric	White	Man	Nonspecific	Upper middle	Past BRT member
Freda	Multiracial	Woman	Spiritual	Lower middle	BRT member
Harold	White	Woman	— ^a	Middle	BRT member
Jeff	White	Man	— ^a	— ^a	BRT member
Judy	White	Woman	Protestant	Upper middle	Past BRT member
Kate	Caucasian	Woman	Questioning	Middle	BRT member
Martha	White	Woman	Questioning	Lower lower	Victim, student
Mikaela	White	Woman	Christian	Middle	Campus stakeholder
Samantha	White	Woman	Christian	Upper middle	Campus stakeholder
Sophie	White	Woman	None	Middle	BRT member

Note. Campus stakeholder = individual who does not serve on the bias response team (BRT) but worked with BRT members to address bias-related incidents.

^a Information not shared with researchers.

Table 2
Description of Cases and Participants Involved

Biased/related incident	Location	Key informant	Response
Transphobia such as students and staff not using pronouns Allan prefers Student documentation not reflecting student's preferred name	Residence hall	Allan Chris Harold Kate Mikaela Samantha	Town hall with students in the residence hall Evaluation of the program
Racist artwork that disrupts classroom learning environment and climate	Classroom building	Eric Judy Freda Jeff Dyas Sophie	Passive programming bulletin board in the classroom setting; educational video about the artist and artwork; faculty members processing the video with students
Homophobic graffiti on Martha's wipe board Additional harassment and hate messages	Residence hall	AllyD Calvin Crimson Martha	Educational LGBT student and staff panel Town meeting

addressing the incident, and the longer term outcome of the process. We interviewed the participants in person to build rapport; participants chose pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. We recorded and transcribed verbatim the interviews and kept field notes and a researcher journal in which we recorded observations about the interviews, inconsistencies in responses from participants, questions for future interviews, and personal reflections about the interviews. The transcripts from participant interviews served as the primary data source. Additional data sources collected and analyzed with the transcripts included case notes and condensed victim reports that Gloria provided, promotional materials about the BRT such as brochures, and articles in local newspapers about incidents when applicable.

Data Analysis

We employed four levels of data analysis: initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding alongside memo-writing at each phase (Charmaz, 2006; Lempert, 2007). We analyzed the data individually and in the three incident case teams (see Table 2). Two researchers independently coded each transcript line-by-line to fracture the data into inductive codes finding action in the participants' words (Charmaz, 2006). We also simultaneously analyzed the case notes and victim reports to examine similarities and differences between the notes and

the participants' descriptions of the cases. We then collapsed similar inductive codes into 5,000 codes. We discussed codes that cut across the data from both the transcripts and case notes, narrowing initial codes to 72 focused codes such as "being an ally," "knowing the history," and "being victim driven" (Charmaz, 2006). This process reflected the constant comparative technique, that is, we compared concept-to-concept to get at action within the process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Next, in axial coding, we connected properties and dimensions of the codes that narrowed focused codes around an axis (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We wrote memos about the primary themes and ongoing questions about our interpretations of the data and drew concept maps reconnecting data around emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006). The final stages of analysis related to theoretical coding or tying the theoretical storyline together. We reached saturation in data analysis (i.e., no new information emerged) with two key categories and the core category of "connecting" that outlines the primary theoretical storyline for all participants (Charmaz, 2006).

Trustworthiness and Limitations

We used strategies to assure trustworthiness or the credibility in research findings such as the following: Multiple researchers individually coded transcripts and compared codes, we

shared findings with each other in the large research team as a form of peer debriefing, participants reviewed their transcripts as a form of member check, and we reviewed documents pertaining to each reported incident in conjunction with analyzing transcripts as a means of triangulating the data (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). We also kept researcher journals and questioned each other's biases in relation to the data to further the examination of researcher reflexivity of the process (Jones et al., 2013). Participants received a summary of findings and offered questions about any perceived inconsistencies about the conceptual model (Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). Some participants found aspects of the depiction of the original model unclear, so we learned how to alter the model to better explain the process. When participants raised questions about themes, we returned to the data to find more evidence to support a particular idea. Finally, we used an outside peer debriefer, a researcher versed in qualitative methods who discussed the conceptual model with the primary investigator and reviewed the summary of findings. We generated this conceptual model from 16 participants' experiences with the BRT at Violet University.

Results

Our analysis of the data revealed one core category and two key categories that characterize the two-sided process through which participants respond to incidents of bias. The core category, *connecting*, weaves throughout the two key categories, the *transparent side* of the process and the *opaque side* of the process.

The transparent side is victim-driven and involves a series of clear steps and connections participants make to address incidents of bias after they have received a report. As Calvin stated, "The BRT is victim-driven or complainant-driven where the student can really talk about their level of involvement or what they'd like to see done." The victim-driven process keeps the victim at the center of the action and response, and the BRT members hope that this philosophy can restore a feeling of control or power to the victim. The opaque side undergirds the way in which BRT members respond and make decisions based on their navigation of

different tensions. Participants navigate these tensions on both conscious and unconscious levels related to how they perceive their roles on the teams. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of the process. There are two sides of the process representing the two key categories presented in the findings. The left side of the model shows the transparent side of the process and each of its three distinct properties that flow in a somewhat linear fashion. The right side of the model depicts the opaque side of the process and the three properties that characterize the opaque side. The opaque side is not linear in nature and there are different things happening simultaneously on each side of the process. For example, the way in which a participant goes about educating others (transparent side) is potentially influenced by the way that s/he is navigating tensions surrounding individual or systemic change and allyship (opaque side). The arrows show how the core category of connecting moves the process along because BRT members connect to each other, the victim(s), and stakeholders across campus to move from one sequence to the next on the transparent side of the process.

Core Category: Connecting to Get Things Done

Participants connect in various ways that permeate both sides of the theoretical process (i.e., transparent and opaque) because "things get done." As Mikaela stated, ". . . we have very good people and we have lots of good friends across departments, and that's how things get done." BRT participants connect with the victims to understand their needs, meet their wishes when possible, and uphold the mission of the teams; BRT members discuss and plan a response; and institutional stakeholders may be able to assist them in implementing the proposed response. Because the BRT operates on a voluntary basis, participants are not given financial resources, nor do they have formal power to carry out their work. Subsequently, connecting emerged as the core category, expressing the way participants are able to move the response process forward despite the institutional and personal tensions they face such as supporting the victim while also considering how to make systemic change.

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Transparent Side of the Process

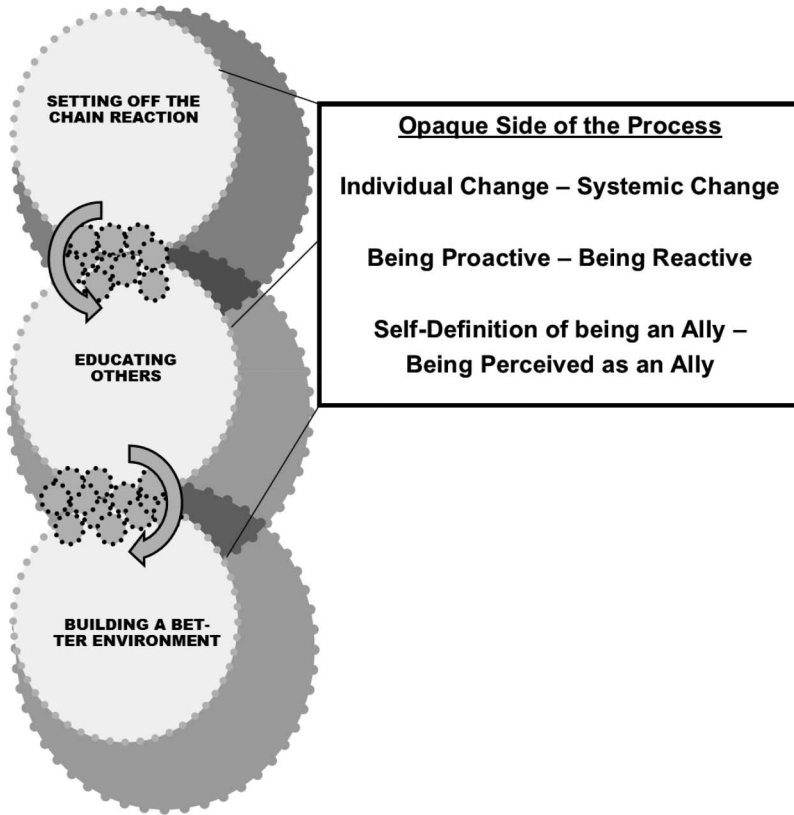


Figure 1. Repetitive process for the bias response team (BRT). The transparent side represents three distinct themes that exemplify the process that BRT members use. On the opaque side, these three themes represent considerations that BRT members make on continuums through every phase of the transparent side of the process. Some of these considerations are more obvious to some BRT members than others; thus, this side is opaque. The arrows represent the way BRT members connect (i.e., to each other, campus stakeholders, and victims) to move the process along.

Transparent Side of the Process

There are three distinct properties that characterize the way the transparent side unfolds. These three dimensions are (1) setting off the chain reaction, (2) educating others, and (3) building a better environment.

Setting off the chain reaction. The BRT process begins when the BRT receives an incident report. As Allan, a victim of a bias incident, shared (see Table 2), “I guess ultimately [I was] the first person who reported and that set off a chain reaction.” This dimension links the complainants (victims) to the BRT and moves

the process from one that exists in theory to one that is operationalized in reality. Jeff described this dimension as a catalyst as he further outlined the chain reaction:

Just like all BRT reports, we will get a report from someone, and that really is the catalyst that gets us working, so we receive reports from several students concerning this particular incident and then that’s where the team involvement goes. And then the team, we are victim-driven, so we meet with people and see what kind of outcome they want, and then we try to help them through that process.

As BRT members connect to other stakeholders on campus, they create official and unoffi-

cial networks of potential support for victims of bias incidents. Connecting then moves the process forward as participants connect with others to work toward educational solutions with the intent of creating a better, more understanding, and diverse environment for all individuals at the institution.

Educating others. The BRT responds to a situation or incident by educating others on the individual and sometimes the systemic level as well. Martha, a victim of a bias incident at the institution (see Table 2), talked about her experiences with the individual aspect of the BRT's education:

It was nice to have university backing because even when I'm facing something like this, my family can only do so much to help. And I think that's the biggest thing, and I appreciate that [BRT members] were there to help.

On the individual level, educating others is about supporting and educating the individual victim and perpetrator (if known). On the systemic level, educating others involves programming, awareness campaigns, or policy change that stretches beyond the individual victim and perpetrator and impacts an entire community at the institution in a nonpunitive manner. As AllyD noted, the BRT response is "not punitive but educational."

Building a better environment. Building a better environment occurs on the individual and systemic level as well. If one individual has a better experience, feels supported, and is retained on the institutional level, then the environment is better for that individual. Mikaela talked further about her experience in providing support to a transgender student who experienced bias because of others' refusal to use his new name instead of his old name:

There have been two or three members on his floor who still insist when they're talking about Allan, they use feminine pronouns. And one happened in my office, and I corrected him, and he said, "Oh whatever." The pessimist in me thinks that they're doing it on purpose. I hope that that's not just a continuous little nibble that he hears all the time. . . . We'll just have to keep an eye on things and see if we need to intervene more.

Mikaela provided support to Allan when he experienced issues of bias around his name and gender identity. She also responded to the incident by correcting those who victimized Allan by using incorrect pronouns. Although Mikaela

recognized the progress that had been made in part because of the support from the BRT, she was also prepared for more incidents to arise in the future. In this way, she acknowledged the pervasive nature of bias toward Allan within his environment and the challenges that arose when the incident response focused only on the victim and did not move to systemically change the environment.

On the systemic level, the BRT hopes to make an impact and build a better environment for all students who experience bias. Participants connect with people who can influence the situation on an institution-wide level. Kate expanded on the name incident from above:

We were talking in team and we were like, "Wow, I wonder how hard it is to get your name changed all over campus." We started thinking about where else could this be occurring. So right after this first incident is when I started talking to [Chris] about this and we decided to pull together a group of people that I thought might have some input with figuring out the name change process on campus. But the reality is we knew this was an issue in little small pockets, so we started investigating and finding out it was an issue in a lot of other places and we never had to use this particular person's details to discuss it because it's just a reality, not only for our students who identify as transgender.

Because the BRT exists within the larger context of the institution, there is an implicit need for the BRT to place their efforts in the larger culture of their institution. Building a better environment takes the outcome of educating others further by saying that there is an intended goal within the response process; by educating others, a better environment is achieved.

Opaque Side of the Process

Participants acknowledged that they negotiate tensions within the process, but the degree to which the tensions are visible from their viewpoint varies from one participant to another, making this part of the process opaque. This key category also consists of three dimensions that become apparent as participants confront different tensions that exist for them in their BRT work: navigating between individual and systemic change, being proactive versus being reactive, and self-defining as an ally or being perceived as an ally. Each dimension exists on a spectrum, and the participants find themselves

fluctuating between the two ends of the spectrum.

Navigating between individual and systemic change. Because the BRT impacts the individual as well as the larger, systemic environment throughout the process, different participants think about creating change in different ways. Dyas, a BRT participant, described this nuanced deliberation: “The victim is a primary goal of the BRT, then some sort of educational aspect of the situation . . . improving the overall campus environment if possible. And in most cases [we] don’t get to sort of a macro-institutional level.” Dyas’ quotation illuminates how responding on an individual level with a victim or perpetrator does not necessarily constitute systemic change in the larger community.

Conversely, the following quotation from Mikaela shows how not all BRT members think that the teams do or should only be focused on individual change:

All of those things boil down to good community and civility, and treating each other with respect, and creating an environment where students can succeed. And so with all of that emphasis, I think at this point it’s just a given that we’ll address these kinds of things.

Likewise, Kate, in response to a question about her ideal outcome, expressed,

When you do see a really positive impact and where a student maybe had this horrible situation, you see some healing happen and some institutional changes, and some are connected to campus in some way they didn’t before, and they succeed because they felt supported through that.

Whereas some participants see the importance of systemic change and how that is important for educating others and creating a better environment, other participants gain satisfaction and fulfillment based on the BRT’s ability to impact an individual. Each participant navigates this tension internally, which potentially leads to a lack of cohesion as the process moves along. The response to a bias-related incident is impacted by the participants’ perception of their ability to influence the process.

Navigating between being proactive and reactive. Because the BRT was set up as a response to bias incidents at the institution, the BRT is inherently reactive. However, building a better environment, an aspect of the transparent side, potentially has roots in proactive practice.

BRT members put energy toward creating that better environment in which acts of bias do not reoccur or negatively influence someone else, thus making aspects of their process proactive. For some BRT participants, the process remains tied strictly to the victim and therefore the BRT must react and respond to that individual’s incident. As Sophie discussed,

[The BRT] really is meant to be a reporting mechanism and a victim support educational body. So I think some folks sometimes get frustrated with that and want us to do more like create a campus response. But that’s really not . . . was never the intention of the teams.

However, other BRT members, like Eric, choose to focus on the broader capabilities of the BRT taking a more proactive focus: “And there were times when we could do things, we could influence policy to make things more inclusive.” Dyas also commented on the participants’ desire to be proactive, “. . . I think that we do pretty well, but at times, we . . . overstep our original mission when necessary.” Dyas referred to the founders of the BRT who designed the process as victim-driven. Again, each member navigates this tension internally based on the way he or she makes meaning of the process. This can lead to a lack of consistency in the different approaches of the BRT because, although some responses may have implications for future policy changes, the response itself stays solely within an individual-level response.

Navigating between self-defining as an ally and wanting to be perceived as an ally. To be a member of a BRT, some participants stated that they have to see themselves as allies for those who possess marginalized social identities. This implicit requirement leads participants to struggle with either their role on the BRT validating their internal identification as an ally or their role on the BRT serving as evidence to others who would then subsequently designate them as an ally. Freda, for example, talked about how part of the process became validating ally status for some participants:

I just think that it’s important that folks know that you choose to be an ally, you choose to be on their side and you will not insofar as possible, you will not allow anything to happen to them while you’re on watch. So I just think that’s totally important . . . choosing to be an ally, letting others know you’re an ally being very clearly identified as an ally and I think that that’s what the [BRT] are.

Those who wanted to be perceived as allies use the teams as a way to contribute to the hopeful attainment of others' perception of them as allies. Eric articulated this when he recounted,

I think there are so many of my gay and lesbian friends who are involved in diversity education, fighting racism and other isms, and they're White, and I think it's because we have an understanding of what it's like to be both in the majority and have privilege. . . . Some of my radical friends would say we're chosen people because we can see the privilege, but we can also see the oppression and that gives us a special insight.

Because of the focus on ally status, part of the process became about validating ally status for BRT members. Navigating ally status, or perception thereof, takes away from the original intent of the victim-driven process and detracts from keeping the victim at the center of the process.

Participants grapple with the dimensions of the opaque side in uneven ways. Thus, we display the two-sided multidimensional theoretical process in the conceptual model (see Figure 1).

Discussion

The findings from this study touch on the delicate interplay between the participants and their work in addressing an incident of bias. The core category of connecting reveals how participants work together to resolve incidents of bias while seeking to be victim-driven and striving for organizational or systemic change to enhance the climate for diversity. However, this work does not happen without addressing opaque tensions in every phase of the process. The DLE (Hurtado et al., 2012) is useful in situating how the emerging theoretical process speaks to the cocurricular interaction between student and campus educator within the BRT context. From the findings, three themes emerged that extend or complicate what we know about diversity work in student affairs and BRTs.

Toward Improving Campus Climate: The Role of Connecting

The current literature highlights how student conduct administrators or police officers may rely on guidelines and protocols or punitive actions to respond to incidents of bias (Associ-

ation for Student Conduct Administrators, 2013; Footer, 1996; Schrage & Giacomini, 2009). Furthermore, one of the standards of professional practice for chief diversity officers calls for "procedural knowledge" of how to respond to incidents on campus (Worthington et al., 2014, p. 231). These suggest that a clear set of guidelines or policies exists that dictate how bias incidents should be responded to. In contrast, the core category of connecting emerged as the mechanism participants operationalize to move the response process along despite the myriad organizational challenges they face. Our findings add to the literature by explicating how campus educators leverage relationships and build coalitions to work through the tensions outlined in the Results section to address incidents of bias. Thus, the findings suggest that the quest for connecting is happening in two planes while BRT members work through the transparent and opaque sides of the process simultaneously. The first plane is student to institutional agent (or campus educator), one who influences student success and/or the reproduction of inequality in an organization (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Allan, one of the victims in our study, exemplified this dynamic between student and campus educator when he noted how he felt empowered by the victim-driven philosophy of the BRT. In the second plane, BRT members are working to increase their own institutional power and prestige. This presents previously unexamined dynamics related to ways participants (a) respond to incidents, (b) develop ally status, and (c) strive for organizational change.

All the participants viewed their ability to connect as positive because it affords them agency in spite of the organizational limitations of the BRT. However, the concept of connecting is not without its challenges. One critical challenge is that BRT members often have to renegotiate their expectations regarding the amount of change they can create. The DLE notes that processes exist that influence the (re)socialization of students, validation, and building of a sense of community through encouraging students' sense of belonging at the intersection of students and staff identities and their intentional practices (Hurtado et al., 2012). These processes are supposed to work in union with each other. The emergent model suggests that some of the participants may have enough power and/or connections to en-

gender positive individual change for the student involved, but they may not have enough power and/or connections to produce the sort of systemic change that some participants in our study espoused as a goal of the BRT. This challenge underscores the difficulty in aligning all of the cocurricular processes (e.g., educational responses to bias-related incidents or proactive programs presented by staff in cultural centers) to one goal. Rendon (1994) in her theory of validating culturally diverse students asserted the importance of institutional transformation that emphasizes serving diverse student populations in concert with the interpersonal interactions between campus educators and students. Some literature has looked at how students are validated in the classroom space exists (Barnett, 2011; Hurtado, Cuellar, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011), but our conceptual model suggests that from a cocurricular vantage point, a BRT's ability to create systemic change rests in the depth and breadth of team members' connections.

This dynamic also presents another challenge associated with connecting—how the team members are socialized on the teams. The DLE notes that the historical context “is rarely assessed and as a consequence, there are minimal links established to educational outcomes” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 59). Our findings suggest that the historical context of an organization has been an understudied but critical influence on the response process. Although team members receive little formal training, all the participants were able to articulate the history of the BRT, including why and how the teams started. This practice constitutes an “information channel” or the means by which connecting is used to provide information that then facilitates action (Coleman, 1988). The informal passing of historical information limits innovation in the process due to team members who are tied to the original intent of the teams. Epistemological differences that the team members possess are not readily discussed. Participants holding conflicting beliefs of the purpose and goals of the BRT may be a reason why systemic change is not always accomplished, as it is difficult to move as a cohesive unit toward multiple goals simultaneously.

Complicating Ally Status in Diversity and Bias-Incident Work

Conflicting views of the goals and purpose of the teams are not the only instance of the team members working from differing epistemologies. Being perceived as an ally or self-defining as an ally stood out because of the variability in the responses from participants. Much of the literature to date on ally identity development in higher education is from the student point of view (Bishop, 2002; Broido, 2000; Reason, Roosa Millar, & Scales, 2005). The DLE model acknowledges the importance of staff identity in cocurricular experiences. Therefore, participants openly identifying as an ally has important implications for campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012). Few articles directly speak to the role and skills needed for campus educators who view themselves as allies. Reason and Davis' (2005) study highlights the “interrelated concepts of socially constructed identities, multiple identities and cognitive development” (p. 6), potentially explaining why the team members in our study fluctuated in response to thinking about their ally identity. However, this study does not detail the effect of a group of educators negotiating their ally identity together and separately.

Edwards' (2006) theoretical model on aspiring social justice ally development builds on Reason and Davis' (2005) work to present nonlinear statuses that are useful in delineating different types of allies. Allyship was seemingly the goal for some of the participants in our study, consistent with the aspiring ally for altruism (i.e., participants limiting the focus of the BRT to individual support of victims), whereas for others, the focus on the interrelatedness of social issues on campus was more of a concern, consistent with aspiring allies for social justice. Edwards asserted, “the most credible and authentic naming of social justice allies is done by members of the oppressed group” (p. 54). Yet, many of the participants in our study felt comfortable identifying as allies, even noting it as an implicit requirement to be on the BRT.

Eric's quotation is an example of a participant who had a salient sensitivity to the importance of being named an ally and not wanting to define for himself because in his view that action perpetuates privilege and hegemony, reinforcing a status quo of Whiteness because a

White person with unearned power names oneself as an ally to an oppressed individual or group. Often, participants who operated with this thinking recognized and tried to work around the limiting effects of the reactive nature of the BRT when trying to create a better environment. Interestingly, the participants did not articulate that the differing ally identity interpretations impeded the response process in any substantive way. Thus, our model suggests that like-mindedness with regards to ally identity is not a requisite for social justice work in a group. Accordingly, our model complicates the field's understanding of ally development and how it is manifested for campus educators. This point does raise the question of whether the effectiveness of the teams would be altered if they were all operating from a similar understanding in regards to their ally identity. If participants talked about the differences in their conceptions of allyship, they might understand each other's perspectives about how to best respond to a bias-related incident and why.

A New Look at Systemic Change and Climate for Diversity Efforts

As evidenced from some of the participant responses in the tension of creating systemic or individual change, some participants viewed helping just one student as a positive outcome of the process. This model of changing campus climate one person at a time is rooted in humanist notions of social change. Humanists believe the words of Martin Luther King that "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly" (King, 1964). So by changing one student directly, participants indirectly affect campus climate. Helping one student was in the BRT's locus of control and served as a tangible measure of the team's efficacy. Participants such as Sophie staunchly believed that the response process should be reactive in nature, true to the original mandate of the teams. The intense focus on the individual student's perception of the environment aligns with the psychological dimension of the DLE (Hurtado et al., 2012) and other literature that highlights the importance of intentionally responding to the differences in campus climate perception between minoritized students and students with dominant social

identities (Evans & Brodido, 2002; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Renn, 2010).

Working in the institutional context and on the two dimensions of psychological and historical climate (Hurtado et al., 1999, 2012) is extremely important and should be lauded. However, our model suggests that the BRT has the capacity to address other dimensions of campus climate and other contexts of the DLE model toward truly making a better environment for the victims of bias (Hurtado et al., 2012). For example, participants noted the ad hoc creation of a task force to seek policy changes related to preferred student name. This effort stemmed from the work of the BRT to substantively address the policy context of the DLE and the organizational and behavioral aspects of campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012). Dyas noted that sometimes teams have to step beyond their original mission to create a more sustained influence on the campus environment. So, although the capacity may exist and is sometimes used, there is not a consistent agreement among participants about their work being connected to the different dimensions of climate and different contexts of the DLE (Hurtado et al., 2012). This theme accentuates the complications some campus educators face with trying to address the different aspects of social justice work as a collective. In addition, our findings assert as does the DLE that the effective intersection of "staff identity, programming for design of content, and practices centered on student development" are critical to maximizing organizational efforts that seek to foster a more inclusive climate (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 81).

Implications for Practice and Future Research

As BRTs continue to proliferate across institutions of higher education, we offer three specific implications for practice. These ideas emanate from the discussion about the way participants connected to accomplish their goals, conceived of their ally status, and strived to use their work with the BRT in enhancing the overall climate for diversity. First, we found that often participants worked outside of their formal job requirements and leveraged connections to get things done. Participants believed that working outside the system is advanta-

geous, it leads to questioning whether or not having connections on campus is a prerequisite for being able to serve on the team. This questioning is a product of how participants set unclear boundaries between institutional role and responsibility and the resources they use in addressing bias-related incidents. Stanton-Salazar (2011) stated that empowering institutional agents builds and leverages social capital (connections) through three types of resources: personal, positional, and other alters (i.e., individuals mobilizing efforts on behalf of students who have experienced a bias-related incident). For participants it was imperative that they have the requisite level of social capital to redress bias on an individual and institutional level; however, what was unclear was the level of social capital that was embedded in the positional role as BRT members. Although long-tenured BRT members may have the social capital to mediate a bias incident, their presence on the team may also hinder the imagination of what the BRT could become. We encourage campus educators to be conscious of the resources (personal, positional, and alter) they deploy and the complications that can arise from negotiating the three types in diversity work. Stanton-Salazar (2011) is clear that institutional agents must have the three types of resources to empower campus constituents, and more research needs to be done that examines how these resources are accrued and deployed by practitioners engaged in diversity work.

Second, we suggest that epistemological differences between participants related to their conceptions of the purpose of the BRT as well as constructions of allyship matter. Campus educators might consider using external facilitators with expertise in bias response to work with the teams to outline their objectives. BRT members must be reflexive and continue with ongoing training because increased cultural self-awareness can improve the effectiveness of the team (Howard, 2003; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004; Reason & Broido, 2005). For example, we suggest that campus educators should make explicit how they conceptualize allyship (e.g., allies for altruism or social justice) because different understandings of allyship manifest in different ways of connecting with victims of bias (Edwards, 2006). It was unclear the extent to which all participants interrogated their notions of allyship with their notions of

privilege. Without this level of individual reflexivity, a BRT focus may become helping marginalized students rather than working in solidarity with students to alter systems of inequity in the campus environment.

Third, the findings from this study speak to the capacity of a BRT to move beyond the individual level to systemic change for DLEs (Hurtado et al., 2012). We suggest that administrators periodically reevaluate the structure and philosophy of the BRT. Although the BRT at this particular institution collects some assessment data, the team could improve its assessment efforts by connecting their work to larger institutional learning objectives related to how the outcomes move beyond psychological and historical dimensions of campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012; Schuh, 2009). This call also falls in line with standards put forth by Worthington et al. (2014) for chief diversity officers to be actively involved in campus efforts to address bias incidents and assess the effectiveness of programs and interventions related to issues of equity and inclusion. Campus educators look to mission statements as important signaling mechanisms; they outline the values, aims, and purposes for the institution (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Researchers have demonstrated that diversity initiatives not connected to institutional missions are doomed for failure and ineffectiveness (Bensimon, 2004; Hurtado et al., 2012; Milem et al., 2005). We recommend that BRTs incorporate a cycle of assessment that includes Council for the Advancement of Standards self-assessment, benchmarking, external review (Olshak, 2009), and reference to standards of professional practice for chief diversity officers (Worthington et al., 2014). By engaging in this rigorous form of assessment, BRTs can clearly articulate their connection to the institutional learning objectives related to multiple dimensions of climate for diversity to more effectively report outcomes of addressing bias-related incidents on campus (Hurtado et al., 2012).

In conclusion, this study explored the process by which an institution responds to bias-related incidents and in the process the findings exemplified the tensions that make diversity work for researchers and campus educators in higher education challenging. We offer three recommendations for future research. First, this study should be extended to different types of cam-

puses (e.g., minority-serving institutions, urban, community college) to see whether the process is different at institutions that serve different student populations. Second, crucial to the work of bias response is the application of scholarly notions of allyship. More empirical work is needed to both validate and expand our theoretical constructs of allyship, particularly beyond the individual level to the group level. Finally, we call for more scholarly inquiry that explicitly examines the ways in which a BRT influences systemic change, particularly how campus educators within BRTs leverage the three types of resources (personal, positional, and alters; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). This work may lead to altering systemic processes that perpetuate inequitable systems from which incidents of bias originate.

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