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Understanding Group Cohesion and Self-Advocacy in Student Leaders

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Understanding Group Cohesion and Self-Advocacy in Student Leaders

Action research project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts, Higher Education Leadership

by
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Abstract

This project sought to explore and understand how people, particularly women, chose to exercise their voices in group settings, with a focus on the group dynamics. Often times it seems that it can be easier to speak up for the benefit of others, but women rarely know how to navigate advocating for themselves, especially with regards to group dynamics. Women are often the ones talked over or shut down in groups. In a patriarchal society, it is important to understand how women can better utilize their voices in order to speak up for the treatment and respect that they deserve. Women in this study were encouraged to discover how strong their voices can be, and how they could best use them in terms of self-advocacy. My research questions could be summed up as: How do I encourage the young women I work with to speak up in groups for themselves? Through the results of this study, I learned how to become a better advocate for myself, as well as helped other women understand that while it is important to defend others, it is also important to put ourselves on our priority list. We better understood our own intrinsic motivations for participating in group settings and were able to utilize this understanding to strengthen our voices.

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Introduction

Through personal reflection, I have come to realize that I strongly value the concept of advocacy. Advocating for others, or having others advocate for you, can be beneficial in different facets of life because there is power in numbers and comfort in support. Knowing someone is in your corner, willing to stand with and support you, is an important concept because it can give you the confidence to speak your mind. My mentor told me throughout college that it is imperative to be able to lend our own voices when others' are not being heard, and advocating for others in a group can certainly play a part in making sure that everyone gets heard. Indeed, advocacy may be one of the most important factors in invoking change.

I also value empowerment, especially of women. Too often, women are their own worst critics. There are many harsh rules and judgments that women must try to navigate throughout society. It is rare to find ways that people build women up. It is important to encourage voices of women because as a result, this leads to leadership development, another of my values. I believe everyone has the potential to exercise leadership, if they know what they stand for and have allies willing to support and stand with them.

These values together, advocacy, empowerment of women, and leadership development, led to the development of my Action Research project. In a leadership development class using case-in-point, the class encountered conflict through the large group dynamic. I often had a strong voice in class, either swaying the conversation of the group, or jumping to defend those who were not being heard or were judged wrongly. However, while I was quick to be an advocate for others in the class, I shut down after a woman personally attacked me. I became flushed and stayed silent.

I wondered what was lacking to speak up for myself, or what motivated me to speak up for others. I wondered if other people, particularly women, face similar challenges because we do not empower ourselves enough. Many women are raised to consider others before themselves, and I wonder how this plays out when we are placed in groups, or in situations of adversity. If other women lacked the same self-advocacy like I did in that moment, how can we ever hope to empower more women in leadership roles, or in primarily male dominated fields, or secure gender equality?

In Eagly's (2009) study of prosocial behavior based on gender, it was found that there were differences in whether or not women or men were more socially conditioned to respond in certain situations benefiting others. When the call for help came from the roots of chivalry, where "rescue" was needed, men were more apt to step forward. However, women are more often providing sensitive emotional support (Eagly, 2009). While it may be easier for women to express empathy and compassion by speaking up for others, society has structured us to not pay the same attention to ourselves, which may hinder the work of feminism. This project will allow me personally to better understand how I can use my strong voice for the benefit of myself, because I am as deserving as all of the others that I try to always be an ally for. Through my own journey of discovering self-advocacy, I will encourage other women to develop their own voices. As a result of all of this empowerment, this project will help create a new generation of strong women leaders. My goal is to prove that while it is very important to be advocates for each other, it may be more important to understand how to take a stand for ourselves.

Research Questions

My research was centered around the following research questions:

1. How do I encourage my students to speak up not just as advocates for others, but also for themselves through the strengthening of my own self-advocacy?
2. How does gender impact students' motivation to speak up for themselves in groups?

Background

Men and women come into their identities differently, based on social constructs that define how masculinity and femininity are established (Lucas, 1997). Marcia (1980) introduced identity statuses to explain how young adults experience and resolve crisis. There are two critical variables in identity formation: exploration (crisis) and commitment (Marcia, 1999). Lucas (1997) used this context to understand how women and men establish their identity development based on their gender. It was shown that women have less strong and less-generalized self-efficacy beliefs than men (Lucas, 1997). In other words, society shapes women to believe less of themselves than their male counterparts think of themselves. In group settings where women are put against men, they may doubt their own voices and allow the men to take the reins of authority. Society has shaped women to believe less of themselves and to not have the same amount of confidence in their own leadership abilities.

Feminism is an important thread that ties together my Action Research proposal. Robnett & Anderson (2017) studied how feminism takes root across different cultures. It was guided by multiracial feminist theory to examine how diverse backgrounds may lead to different definitions of feminism, and whether (and why or why not) the participants identified as feminists (Robnett & Anderson, 2017). The overall goal for feminism is equality, but sometimes people are hesitant

to label themselves as “feminists” because the name has an ugly connotation attached. For example, there is a strong Latinx preference to not identify as feminist because their culture emphasizes the importance of adhering to traditional gender roles (Robnett & Anderson, 2017). When considering group dynamics, this fact may change how Latinx participants are willing to utilize their voices. Feminism is a movement for equality and requires both advocacy for others and for oneself. However, knowing how differences in groups could skew the perception of feminism within the group itself could help highlight different comfort levels people might experience advocating in a group setting. These roles can also be put in place by the larger organization that the group is a part of. For example, in an action research project on the effects of the designation of “changemaker campus” at the University of San Diego, Barbeau (2012) examined the difference between “being” and “seeming” this designation. The “changemaker campus” designation aims to make a campus a more inclusive community and develop leaders’ voices in a way that lets them advocate for social justice (Barbeau, 2012). Changing the structure of the entire campus DNA to promote inclusivity and sharpen social justice is a really great step in encouraging students to find their voice and use it to combat injustices. However, it may be difficult to promote structures where everyone is heard, without silencing those that usually have privilege (Williams, 2013). Social justice is an important core value of the University of San Diego, and it trickles down to be important in the Office of Ethical Development and Restorative Practices as well. Understanding women’s perceptions and knowledge of social justice and how that may shape their decision making would be an important factor in group settings where men and women are collaborating for a common goal, because typically women hold less privilege than their male counterparts. This can raise the anxiety of the group and present more complications to leading through these adaptive challenges (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Group performance is an important facet to consider with regards to developing this project because the pressures on the group's holding environment may shape decision making differently for everyone in the group. Women might behave differently when they are making decisions on their own, instead of in collaboration with other women and men for a common goal. The willingness to engage in groups can stem from how comfortable the group members feel with each other. This comfort can come from having someone relatable in the group. This comfort can be increased with time. Through a study on group cohesion, it was found that time neutralized the surface-level differences among a group (age, race, sex) as the deep-level differences (attitudes, beliefs, values) became more important (Harrison, Price & Bell, 1998). The social identity approach to leadership is a group phenomenon, wherein leaders mobilize followers to the extent that they successfully manage a shared group identity (Steffens et. al, 2015). The same social identity approach can be used to enhance and refine present knowledge of implicit follower theories (IFT's) because those social factors influence people's engagement in groups (Steffens, Haslam, Jetten, & Mols, 2016). People often determine their sense of self, based on categorizing themselves with others. This linking correlates with people's capacity to influence/be influenced (Steffens et. al, 2016).

Lucas (1997) went further in his study to say that women are more geared towards attachment and men are more geared towards autonomy. This means that women will be less likely to say anything that they believe would go against the group they belong to. The sense of belonging is much more prevalent in women- men are less afraid to speak their opinions because being part of the group is less important than their own autonomy (Lucas, 1997). Group performance often depends on those willing to voice suggestions and opinions but being in a group can result in group members not speaking their minds, out of fear of going against the

group's values (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith & Kamdar, 2011). Because of this, implications for group performance can come into play. Therefore, it is important to understand what encourages and what impedes voices (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). The group may not lend a safe space for students to participate, and cause students to shy away from offering their thoughts and opinions. To encourage voices to be spoken, we have to establish climates where these voices can be heard. This is particularly important when encouraging the voices of female students to be heard; those voices might be ignored or disregarded if the rest of the group cannot relate to the social identities those voices represented. How can we encourage women to still speak up, as well as change a group's perceptions so that they are heard?

Oftentimes, *advocacy* is examined in studies considering how parents advocate for their children in schools (Duquette, Fullarton, Orders, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011). While advocating for children is an important facet of advocacy, this represents a gap in leadership development. Students should learn advocacy skills much sooner than parenthood, and those skills that they learn should encompass how to advocate for themselves so that their parents do not need to advocate for them longer than necessary. The willingness to advocate can depend on different circumstances, for example, if group members feel as though their attitudes will be in sync with the attitudes of the group, they are more willing to participate in the group (Akhtar & Wheeler, 2016). If they feel as though they have a different core attitude than the group, and that the group will not be persuaded to match their personal beliefs, they are less likely to participate in the group (Akhtar & Wheeler, 2016). Learning the different facets of advocacy, as well as what motivations people use to act on whether or not to advocate, is an important first step because these motivations will play a role in encouraging women to use their voices, especially in groups. Knowing why someone might speak up will allow us to establish strategies to strengthen and

reinforce those motivations so women are more confident in using their voices, for others and for themselves.

Context

This study took place through my job as the Graduate Assistant in the Office of Ethical Development and Restorative Practices. This office resides in the Division of Student Affairs. It is located in the bottom floor of the University Center at the University of San Diego. It is responsible for the implementation of the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities (“Office of Ethical Development”, 2018). I began this position in July as a new Graduate Assistant in this role, which presented some challenges in the design and implementation of my project as I was not entirely sure what my role would look like. Originally, I was reporting to Dr. Tyler Crisman, the Assistant Director for Student Conduct for the first semester, but with the organizational restructuring of the Student Affairs Department that happened this year, I am currently under the supervision of Mandy Womack, an Assistant Dean of Students, for the second semester. In my role, I supervise the Student Conduct Leadership Team (SCLT), which consists of students who sit on boards to provide hearings to students requiring judicial action for having broken University rules or policies. The students serving on the SCLT met once a month for time-sensitive trainings that I organized. These trainings allowed me to analyze group dynamics, including women’s motivation to speak up in those groups for themselves and others. The students also served on Peer Review Boards (PRBs) together as small groups of three when hearings occur. These instances gave me a much smaller group dynamic to observe, but similar findings from a larger group can tend to trickle down to smaller groups as well. I included these PRBs as opportunities for collecting data because I was not getting enough volume of surveys from the trainings alone, as there were not as many trainings as I had anticipated and less

students than I would have liked involved in my research project. In total, I had eight students participating in my research project; I did have two male students participating, so I was sure to include them in all activities and see if together, we determined a difference among their willingness to engage versus their female student counterparts'.

When I was planning the monthly trainings, I was responsible for starting them off with a teambuilder to get the group more familiar with each other so they were more in sync as a team when they were serving on boards together. I made sure to choose teambuilders that were particularly difficult and not necessarily able to be completed in the given time frame in order to raise the temperature of the room by presenting my students with a challenge they had to work through as a group (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Through the organizational restructuring of the Student Affairs Department, I have had to practice my own self-advocacy in order to maintain what was best for myself and my students during this transition. I believe that this research will benefit the office as a whole, allowing future GA's to understand what to push for and allowing students to develop their leadership skills by grasping the importance of self-advocacy. I believe the Student Conduct Leadership Team will benefit from this research because they do work together so infrequently that there really is not a lot of time to build solid group dynamics, and so they must learn to see themselves in the group and do their part to advocate for cohesion throughout the entire year.

Needs Assessment

In my Integral Leadership Theory class, we studied case-in-point pedagogy and how we took up our authority in this setting. Because the professor largely remained silent during the class, students led the discussion. Thus, group dynamics were available for study as we played our part in them.

With so many students from so many diverse backgrounds in the same room trying to all use their distinct leadership styles simultaneously, conflict often arose. People would speak too brashly and offend others, or stay silent out of fear of offending others. Often, I was a strong voice in the classroom. However, one particular instance the conflict was against me, personally. I made an observation and a woman behind me disagreed with me, in a manner I interpreted as being very rude. I was so stunned and offended by her remark. However, instead of asking what my later reflections suggested I should have asked, I flushed and went silent. In a way, by not standing up for myself, I validated her way of thinking; I let her make me feel inferior because I did not defend my own worth.

I sat uncomfortably with this for the rest of the class. I was upset at myself for my missed opportunity in properly handling the situation. I was upset at the group as a whole for not having someone fill the role I usually took up for others and was perhaps waiting for. With regard to group dynamics, what did it mean for the system as a whole to allow anyone to feel invalidated and shut down? This was the experience for me that highlighted the need to begin a journey in self-advocacy for myself. While I am still wading through the messiness that being an ally can be, I realized in that moment that it was much easier for myself to point out injustices when they were happening to other people instead of when I perceived they were happening to me. Looking forward, I realized there will be several instances in my life where I feel shut down or that my worth is being invalidated. I need to learn how to stand up for myself so that I am confident in taking up my authority in group settings because I should not question my validity because of the dynamics of a group.

Through this experience, I discovered a gap in my own learning that needed to be filled. When I stepped back and thought about the why behind my reaction to this situation, I realized it

stemmed from the social pressure of submissiveness that is placed on women. I understood that there was a need for all women to analyze how they valued themselves, as well as what motivations lay beneath their ability to speak up in a group setting. I believe that there is a disconnect between knowing why women tend to (and not to) speak up in groups, and how women value themselves. While advocating for others is incredibly important, I believe it may be more imperative to teach women how to take a stand for themselves, in the name of empowerment and developing strong, vocal, female leaders.

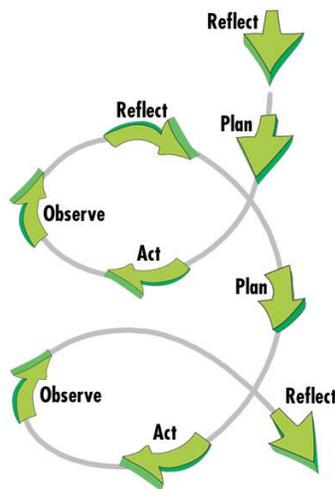
I am working in the Office of Ethical Development and Restorative Practices advising the Student Conduct Leadership Team (SCLT), a group of students who serve on PRBs when necessary for judicial hearings. These PRBs and their monthly trainings present me with the opportunity to explore a group and its dynamics as we talk through difficult situations. I aimed to provide the holding environment for the students on the SCLT to interact in potentially tense situations with each other, so that we could talk through what the experience of conflict was like and reflect on how they felt they handled it. This year, the team was composed of 8 females and 2 males, although one male had so much else on his plate that his voice was seldom part of this group as a whole. I invited these students to help me with my project with the expectation that they would also help themselves through their participation. Their names will be omitted in this report, in order to protect their identity. There were also opportunities for data to be collected privately in interviews between myself and each of them individually, so that their elaborations on their personal reflections could be protected. All of my personal notes and observations, as well as the interview elaborations, were kept in locked files to maintain security.

My critical friends were the ones that were assigned through the Action Research class- Kaila Shivers, Madeline Kreig, and Maria Villanueva-Maycotte were my critical friends this year

throughout my research process. Having this outside perspective brought value to all of our projects as we moved through them.

Methodology

“Action research is about practitioners creating new ideas about how to improve practice, and putting those ideas forward as their personal theories of practice” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2012, pg. 5). This form of research takes place in cycles, allowing the research to change and morph as it develops. Action research allows the researcher a unique opportunity in that the researcher is actually simultaneously part of their own project, and builds those cycles alongside actively participating in them.



<http://cei.ust.hk/teaching-resources/action-research>

Figure 1. Action Research Cycles. This figure shows the implementation of Action Research cycles and the processes that each cycle must travel through.

Action research begins with an idea, which stems from the researcher’s values and their intent on incorporating those values into the work they are doing. A plan is formed to test this idea, and then it is acted upon. The researcher observes this action and then reflects on what must change moving forward in order to delve deeper into the idea, or further formulate the baseline values. A new idea is formed and the cycle then repeats itself. “Action research is a form of

enquiry that enables practitioners to investigate and evaluate their work... their accounts of practice show how they are trying to improve their own learning, and influence the learning of others” (McNiff, Whitehead, 2002, pg.7).

This methodology allowed me to delve into my project fully, as each cycle allowed myself and my students to examine our own values with relation to group cohesion and self-advocacy. The first cycle was a survey (Appendix A) that the students took after being part of a group and experiencing its dynamics, the second cycle a focus group (Appendix B) that brought everyone together to reevaluate ideas and anticipated outcomes of the project, the third cycle was an altered survey (Appendix C) that my participants and I developed together, and the final cycle was another focus group/survey combo (Appendix D) that reflected upon the overall learning and takeaways from being part of this research project. This project stemmed from a personal experience of being shut down and being unable to respond adequately in my own defense. Through journaling and dialogues about this incident with trusted peers and mentors, I came to the realization that this stemmed from the submissiveness that society deems necessary of a woman and is conditioned over time (Lucas, 1997). I wanted to conceptualize my own experience to see if other women would respond in similar manners.

I started to gather informal data from my friends, asking if they believed that it would be easier for them to advocate for themselves or for others. Aligning with what I had begun to hypothesize, men and women gave different answers. The idea for my action research project took place at that point; I wanted the opportunity to explore this idea in a formal, group setting where it would actually be applicable instead of theoretical musings from friends. I value the opportunity to reflect on situations because I think that is where a lot of growth can happen and continuous growth is one of my core values. This was another reason I chose this particular

methodology; it would allow each of my cycles to grow off of reflections from those before them.

Action research is a valuable methodology as it puts the questioner directly in the midst of the learning itself. This particular type of action research helped me best answer my questions because it allowed my students to analyze their own experience in a group that might not always be open to hearing their voices and allowed for reflection and movement through the rest of the learning cycle. This particular methodology gave me opportunities to dialogue effectively with my students and examine our understanding of what it means to be part of a group and how those dynamics might stifle or encourage self-advocacy. I hoped that my students and I would develop confidence in the strengths of our own voices, even when dealing with pressures stemming from group dynamics. The cyclical nature of this methodology allowed my students to take claim of their own learning and examine their values with regards to encouraging all voices to be heard and represented fairly. At the end of all four cycles, students were able to articulate takeaways regarding their growth in understanding their roles in group dynamics, as well as what motivated them to speak up for others and for themselves in group situations.

Cycle I

Cycle I Methodology- Initial Survey

Sub-Cycle 1a: Reflect

For this cycle, I spent a lot of time reflecting on the incident that had formulated my beginning question. A part of me in that instant thought “someone will point this out to the group” but something at play prevented me from being that someone for myself. No one did take on that role for me, and I was left with a bitter taste around my lack of self-advocacy against an older woman.

Sub-Cycle 1b: Plan

My plan was to understand how to change the group dynamics so that advocacy and self-advocacy were tools for empowerment. I planned to begin my research project through a survey (Appendix A) that I could administer to the students every time they were in a group setting. The survey was designed to understand their experience serving as a part of a group, in either the large team monthly meeting setting, or in the groups of 3 that served as Boards adjudicating some student conduct cases. I also had them use scales to rate how easy they found it to speak in defense of others, for themselves, stating a similar opinion to the group, and stating a different opinion from the group. I wanted these questions to give me a sense of what the students were taking from their group experience so I could better understand what dynamics were at play and whether these dynamics were adding to or taking away from a sense of advocacy for others and especially for the students themselves.

Sub-Cycle 1c: Act

Since the team was not established as early in the year as I had hoped, and the number of participants was lower than I had hoped for, I decided to give the survey every time my students served on a Board as a group of three, either with their peers or with a faculty and a staff member, to help even out this quantitative limitation and supply more data towards my research. While this was not ideal because group dynamics are often much different in a group of 3 rather than a group of 10, useful insights were still gathered because what is represented in a larger system often trickles down to smaller subsets of that system (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). I took the same survey on the rare occasion I was needed to serve as the student representative on a Board of three alongside a faculty member and a staff member. In total, I had about 25 surveys from

this first cycle. The group was composed of 7 females and 1 or 2 males at any given time, which made analyzing different responses from a gender perspective rather difficult.

For each monthly training, I began with a team builder. This is part of my role as the GA, in order to foster community amongst the Student Conduct Leadership Team. However, in order to make these trainings meaningful to my research, I purposefully made these team builders challenging in order to raise the pressure in the room and bring group dynamics forward in the hopes that these would provoke meaningful survey responses.

Sub-Cycle 1d: Observe

I was observing and taking notes on my own interpretations of the group dynamics at play. When I facilitated these challenging team builders, I watched to see what kinds of responses my students gave and how they would reflect those on the surveys. I observed students sitting off by themselves instead of partaking in the team builder with the group as a whole. I observed a few voices being dominant and overpowering. I noticed the women would speak more often than the males, perhaps because they greatly outnumbered the male students. I observed that on the few times I was needed to serve on a Board myself, alongside a faculty and a staff member, I left feeling frustrated because I had not asked all the questions I had wanted to ask because their rank and experience made me feel as though they knew more than I did. Thus, if they were done their questioning, I should be as well. Observing all of this, I was expecting my survey results to really help me hone in on the why behind these instances occurring and these feelings lingering. However, the survey responses were all fairly positive, insisting generally that everyone had acted as an ally for everyone else and nothing could have gone better in the group. These surface-level responses inspired a need to dive deeper with my students by encouraging them to examine all facets of their roles in a group.

Cycle I: Data Analysis

In this section, I dive analyze what I learned from each of the survey question responses.

Question 1: Could you have handled a situation better in the group today?

Of the 25 total responses for this question, 8 people indicated “yes” and 17 indicated “no.” This meant that 68% of all participants did not feel as though there was a situation in the group that they should have handled any differently. This seemed to contradict the data I was observing of people handling team builders separately from the team, or letting their voices fall silent under someone with a more dominant voice.

I asked the 32% that had indicated “yes,” if there was a situation they felt as though they could have handled better to elaborate further on why they felt this way. Through their written reflections, there were some common responses that included being unable to speak as much as they had wanted, lacking in confidence to ask what they wanted, and wishing for better collaboration with their teammates. These answers better supported the observations I had made about the groups, even though the percentages were disproportionate. I kept these responses in the back of my mind as I moved forward to see if I could facilitate the group settings in a way to better encourage students to use their voices as much as they felt they needed to in order to be heard, grow their confidences in their abilities as Board members and student leaders, and inviting more collaboration with their peers.

Question 2: Were you an ally for someone else today?

For this question, 18 students (72%) indicated that they felt as though they had served as an ally for someone else in the group they were a part of, leaving 7 students (22%) indicating that this had not been the case for them. For example, one student said, “We all served as allies for each other. We mostly agreed and found common ground but when we didn’t, I was able to

share my opinion and have backing and support [from my team].” And another indicated that they “spoke up when I felt like there could have been unfair treatment towards one student and not all students.” A theme this aligned with was allowing students space to express themselves. The other themes that the positive answers to this question connected around were helping their teammates, and practicing empathy.

The students who did not feel as though they had acted as an ally for someone in the group largely indicated that this was because they did not feel the need. One student said “We respected each other’s opinions and made sure that we discussed things through before we made a decision.” The rest of the negative answers to this question did not fit in categories, but one student indicated that they should have consulted their teammates more, lending another point towards the idea that collaboration is key. Another responded that there was not enough time to discuss deep issues to get to the point of being an ally. Time is a component of group cohesion, allowing more information and deeper-level connections to be conveyed (Harrison, Price & Bell 1998).

Question 3: Did you serve as an ally for yourself today?

23 students (92%) answered “yes” to this question, with only 8% responding with “no.” This was surprising data for me, because serving as an advocate to myself is harder for me than serving as an ally for others, as was evident by the initial event of this entire project. The only elaboration on the “no” response said “I let me questions go unasked because I was not as old or as ‘ranked’ as the other team members,” and this is certainly something I resonated with.

The students who responded “yes” to this question seemed to say “yes” for similar reasons. Most of these responses came about because students felt confident in what they were saying. They tried to ask questions pertaining to their values and were comfortable continuing to

ask questions they felt they needed to be asked. One student said, “I stood true to my own thoughts rather than agreeing with the popular notion.” I was proud of my students for expressing that they felt confident in their own voices and being able to use them in the group situations they were presented with. However, I distinctly remember observing some situations occurring where students did *not* stick with their original opinions because of the influences of the group and so I wondered about the accuracy of this self-reporting data collection technique. According to psychology, a self-serving bias can occur on surveys like this one because people are naturally prone to see themselves best in situations when compared to others. Other kinds of cognitive biases that could skew these self-reported answers include confirmation bias, and actor-observer bias (Cherry 2018).

Question 4: Would the group have gone differently with different resources?

I had originally posed this question because I was thinking of my own initial incident with the older woman in class and how differently that situation could have gone if I had had higher self-efficacy in that moment, or the confidence to utilize self-advocacy. I wondered if someone else had stood up for me in that moment if that would have been enough to trigger me into speaking up for myself. However, the students read this question very literally and only indicated that this would have been true with tangible resources such as a written guide to sanctions or more explicit directions for the team builder. Analyzing this data was not relevant towards my action research project itself, although it was useful for recommending ways to handle the team builders more smoothly in the future.

Scale questions: How easy did you find the following?

These were a short series of questions that asked how easy, with 10 being the easiest, students found different aspects of being in a group. For the first question, which asked how easy

they found it to speak in the group in defense of others, no student ranked the task of speaking in defense of others as below a “5” (Figure 1.1). Most of the responses were given to the “9” and “10” rankings, implying that the students overall found speaking in defense of others a very easy thing to do within their group setting (Figure 1.1). Comparatively, when asked to rank the ease of speaking in defense of themselves, no student ranked the task of speaking in defense of themselves below a “7” (Figure 1.2), indicating that students overall found it easier to speak in defense of themselves when in the group as opposed to for others. This contradicted my initial thoughts about the project, which was important learning for me. It seemed that the lack of my own self-advocacy stemmed less from the groups I may be put in or the situations I may be up against, and more instead from internal work I must still do.

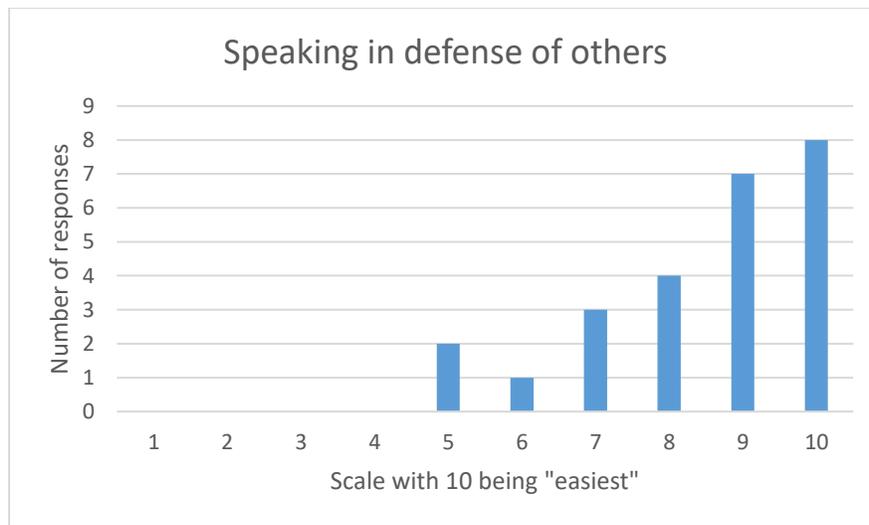


Figure 1.1: The ease of speaking in defense of others

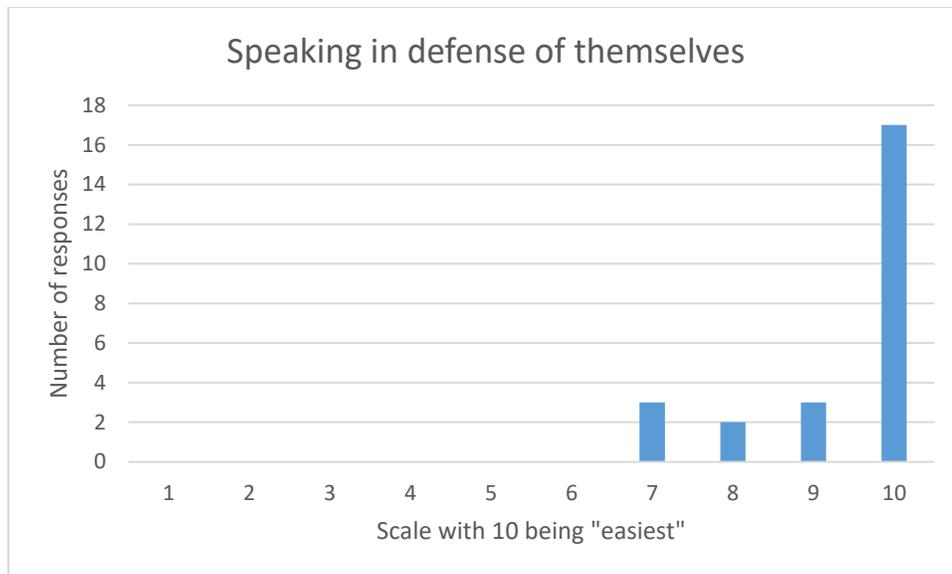


Figure 1.2: The ease of speaking in defense of themselves

The final two questions in this series asked about stating similar or differing opinions from the group itself. My hypothesis was that it would be easier to state an opinion that was the same as the group, as is indicated by the sense of belonging and camaraderie that groups can foster (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). On stating an opinion the same as the groups, 3 students ranked their response at a “5” or below (Figure 1.3), indicating that those three found this task on the more challenging side of the scale. However, most of the responses still gave this task a “10,” implying that overall, students found this an easy task to do within their group setting (Figure 1.3). Stating an opinion differing from the group’s had similar results. One student found this task particularly challenging and rated it as a “2”; however, most of the responses were still rated as a “10,” implying that overall, students found this an easy task to do within their group settings (Figure 1.4).

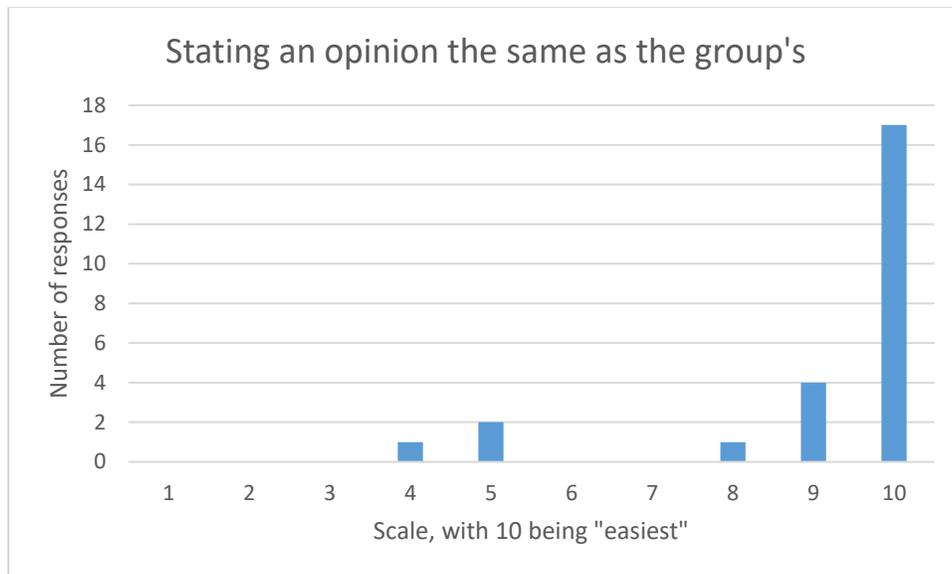


Figure 1.3: Ease of stating a similar opinion to the group

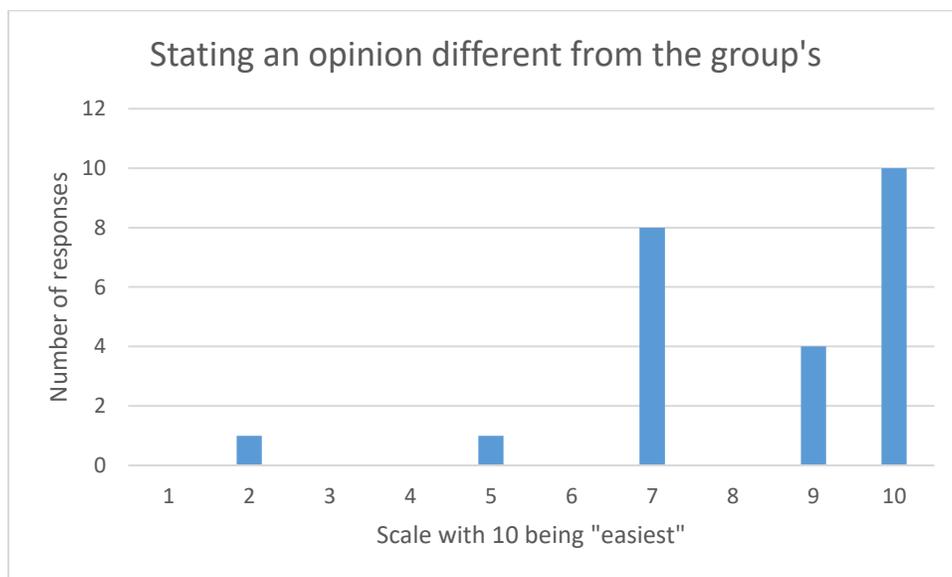


Figure 1.4: Ease of stating a differing opinion from the group

Cycle I: Emergent Themes

The three themes I saw emerging from the data included factors that would attribute to why students found themselves speaking up, both for themselves and for others. They were self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and time. There were no clear differences evident between men and women.

Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy can be defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura 1994, pg. 72). In other words, it is student’s beliefs about themselves that their capabilities are enough. This was evident when students expressed having the confidence to continue asking questions. At times, the majority of the group would feel a certain way and students expressed that although this was the case, if they felt otherwise or needed more clarifying information, they trusted themselves to use their voice in order to continue asking questions that could help guide their personal decision. This theme was also evident when students expressed their ability to be able to hold space for the other members of their team or the alleged offenders of a potential conduct violation to be able to express themselves. This ability of providing space for others was seen by the students as a critical ability they had in being allies for others.

Sense of belonging: Another theme I saw emerge in my students’ responses was a sense of community that allowed them the comfort to use their voices, both for themselves and for others. Through the monthly trainings and holdings of common goals and values, students expressed feeling as though being part of this team meant something and allowed for them to be able to practice empathy with each other and the alleged offenders they would come across. It allowed for them to be able to consider ally-ship as both helping their teammates and working in collaboration with them. The comfort that came to the students from all being on the same team and working towards the common good of restorative practices for the University community as a whole helped them understand the importance of that role and allowed each of them to stake a claim in that by learning how to use their own voices alongside their teammate’s.

The final theme I noticed from my data was *time*: perhaps this is not a separate theme altogether but instead, a thread woven throughout the responses and the other two themes. Students expressed a lack of time being detrimental to their ability to use their voice for allyship; both in the literal sense of being unable to speak as much as they had wanted, or in a sense that “time” and “ally” seemed to be a direct correlation. They expressed that if they did not feel as though they might have served as an ally, it was because they did not have the time to delve into deep issues that might require having or being an ally. In other instances, students expressed not serving as an ally because they did not see the need in the given time provided. On the flip side, time was a component in having students use their voices: having more time allowed for students to enhance their self-efficacy skills, as well as feel a deeper sense of belonging to the Student Conduct Leadership Team, which strengthened their abilities to act as an ally for themselves and for others.

Cycle I Limitations: There were not as many opportunities to hand out the surveys as I had originally planned. In addition to the scrambling for quantitative data, the use of the word “ally” posed a complication in the survey responses as it was framed in such a way that pulled responses from students that had contradicted what I had been observing. This, in combination with self-reporting bias, led to some confusing data. The time itself of this cycle was longer than it should have been; these surveys were handed out through the entirety of the first semester, into intersession. While this was a good thing for this particular cycle, it crunched the time for the subsequent cycles. Finally, this cycle was solely based on self-reporting data, which did not take into effect any self-serving cognitive biases that the students might have been encountering that led to skewing of their perceptions.

Cycle II

Cycle II Methodology- Focus Group

Sub-Cycle 2a: Reflect

As I examined the results I was getting from the first survey, I realized that the answers were not really getting at what I had hoped they might. As I mentioned above, the data that I was observing was not consistent with the survey data. As I reflected on the survey, I realized the wording of some of the statements may have been where students were struggling. In particular, I honed in on the word “ally.” From the beginning, this word choice did not seem to fit well with me. I did not think that it captured what I had been hoping to learn about, which was what compelled people to use their voices to validate their own worth when faced with challenging group dynamics. It hit me then that a word that better encapsulated the goals and values of my project was instead “advocate.”

Sub-Cycle 2b: Plan

I organized a focus group (Appendix B) to reconvene 6 of my students to ask their opinions on my project and what takeaways they hoped to be able to gain from the reflections of the ways they did or did not use their voices. We reflected on our observations of taking the survey, and the overall goals of my project. As a group, we began to plan what the next stages of the project would look like so that it would have the highest impact on each of us individually in helping us understand advocacy and how it was present, or lacking, in our leadership.

Sub-Cycle 2c: Act

I used a large pad of paper to help the students visualize together what we hoped the third cycle would bring us all. We started with naming our values as individuals and as a team: student empowerment, confidence (especially regarding rank), self-advocacy, encouraging authentic

truths, and autonomy and support were what emerged. We then used those values as the central anchors for which we wanted the rest of this research project to help us explore further. We brainstormed questions together that could help the students dig deeper into their reflections around these topics.

Sub-Cycle 2d: Observe

I observed equal participation and desire to use this research project to their advantage from all of my students. I observed some clarity when I described my own mistake with the improper word choice “ally” when I had really hoped to talk about “advocacy.” I compiled the transcription of the focus group and our large collaboration from the pad of paper to help me revamp and revise the past survey into a new survey that could be administered as Cycle III.

Cycle II: Data Analysis

Because the focus group was completely qualitative in nature, there were no specific data to pull into graphs or quantitative analysis. However, I coded the transcript and pulled some important quotes that I wanted to connect here with my research project:

“I think that plays into being an ally for others and yourself; do you have the courage to say ‘let’s try my idea!’?” –Student 1, female

“For me, an ally is speaking in someone’s defense. I did that with [student] because she started to say something and I don’t know if anyone else didn’t hear her but I stopped us to let her elaborate or start talking again... we just have to be working together to make sure that everyone is heard.” –Student 2, female

“I didn’t ask all the questions I had wanted to because I was with the faculty and staff and that dynamic made me feel like ‘okay, they know what they are doing, I will let them take the questions’ and I think that happens a lot but I want to get to a place where we all can have the self-advocacy to be like ‘no, my questions are important too and I am not done’.” –Student 3, male

“We are all working for the same goal, on the same team.” –Student 4, male

“I think I get caught up sometimes because I can always advocate for myself but I struggle with advocating for others because I assume everyone is always going to stand

up for themselves... but we have to make sure that if people are doing their own thing, it is not because they feel excluded from the group. We want to make sure that if someone is apart from the group, it is not because the group is excluding them from that process. Advocating for them in that sense can be as easy as opening the door to make sure they know they are welcome back in, but can also stay out if that is also something they want. Either way, they are being supported.” –Student 2, female

These are a sample of quotes from my focus group transcription that made me believe the students were actively engaged in claiming their part of this learning and wanting this to be valuable for the development of their voices. They were grasping the concept of group dynamics and how they themselves play a part in creating and perpetuating those. They were also understanding how they wanted to define advocacy for themselves moving forward.

Cycle II: Emergent Themes

The three themes I saw emerging from the data revolved around the meanings of advocacy and its relation in a group. The themes are self-advocacy, team collaboration, and advocacy for others.

Self-advocacy: Students discussed what this meant to them and how they realized it played a factor in their leadership. They mentioned wanting to practice this more often, especially up against groups involving different ranks where they might have originally kept quiet because someone else was older or smarter or more experienced. There was a desire to reach a point where students could state with confidence their opinions because their thoughts and experiences are just as valuable as anyone else’s. They wanted to speak from their truths.

Team collaboration: Several times, the topics of depending on their teammates and realizing that everyone is working for the same goal arrived in this conversation. Students felt that the comfort level, familiarity, and support in working towards a common goal let them work together better and further encouraged each other to use their voices.

Advocacy for others: Students defined what this meant and how it appeared in Board settings. They talked about how sometimes, it meant creating space for someone on their team to make sure they were heard and given full attention. They also talked about their jobs of being advocates for the students that come in for a Board through the conduct process, because it is important for those students to understand that the SCLT is trying to help them, not punish them. They talked about empowerment, of each other and the alleged offenders sitting on the other side of the Board, to speak their truths and allow for personal growth.

The questions of the focus group were heavily centered around these topics, probably providing the basis for them emerging as common themes. I think it is important that we, as a group, talked through our values and how advocacy and group dynamics can help or hinder us working towards those values. It was beneficial to frame and define “advocacy” for each of us and understanding its overlap and differentiation from “ally-ship.” The values exercise was also important in serving as a reminder for all of us that we are on the same team and collaboration is key in making sure that our goals are carried out, but also in that everyone has an equal voice and an equal opportunity to be heard.

Cycle II Limitations: Not all of the students who have been participating in my research throughout the year were able to attend this first focus group, leaving out some voices that may have had critical input.

Cycle III

Cycle III Methodology- Revised Survey

Sub-Cycle 3a: Reflect

From that focus group, I gathered questions that better reflected what I had hoped students would be able to draw from this experience and incorporated their own values in order

to make it more worthwhile for them. I used this experience to plan a revised version of the survey they had taken during the first semester and offered this new version (Appendix C) after each time that the group was convened, either in the monthly trainings or in a smaller group of 3 when boards were needed. This allowed the opportunity to reexamine the central goals of the project as a whole and be sure the questions correlated with the group's values so we all were clearer on what takeaways we hoped this project would bring to us and what pieces of ourselves in groups we should pay more reflection to moving forward.

Sub-Cycle 3b: Plan

Using the data gathered from the focus group, I revised the original survey into a new survey (Appendix C) that I could administer to the students every time they were in a group setting during the second semester. The survey was designed to ask them questions regarding their experience serving as a part of a group, in either the large team monthly meeting setting, or in the groups of 3 that served as Boards adjudicating some student conduct cases. This new survey asked if they had noticed moments where someone was not involved in the group and if they had played a role in inviting that group member's voice to be heard, if they had acted in a way that aligns with their personal values, and if they felt as though they served as an advocate for themselves or others. I then had them use scales to rate how high their confidence was in themselves going in and coming out of the group. I also used scales to determine how easy they felt it was to speak as an advocate for others and for themselves. I wanted these questions to incorporate the values and questions we had collectively thought of in the focus group and help them reflect harder on the pieces of their learning I hoped they could stake a claim in through participation in this project.

Sub-Cycle 3c: Act

I continued to hand out the survey after monthly trainings after particularly challenging or tricky teambuilders, and anytime a student was in a smaller group serving as a Board. This was the same process as the first semester. However, there were much less Boards happening this semester, which limited my opportunities to collect survey data. I continued to take the survey as I could to help delve into my own learning, although I also had fewer opportunities to be part of a Board. In total, I received about 10 survey responses from this third cycle.

Sub-Cycle 3d: Observe

In addition to the surveys, I was continuing to observe and take notes on my own interpretations of the group dynamics at play. I observed that the students seemed more willing to speak up in group settings. I observed their tendency to take the team builders this semester as opportunities to work together instead of purely a challenge they had to complete. I also noticed deeper reflection and more articulate responses through the surveys that showed they were really taking into consideration everything that the focus group had asked them to think about.

Cycle III: Data Analysis

The data from these questions each provided themes that felt important to explore. First, I provide an analysis of each question to fully elaborate on some of the survey results.

Question 2: Did you notice moments where someone was not involved in the group discussion?

Of the 10 responses for this question, 50% answered “yes” and 50% answered “no.” I asked the students to elaborate on their answers further, to describe if they had done something to invite the one they noticed to be involved in the discussion, or what factors they believed might have contributed to everyone feeling as though they had a voice. For those who had noticed someone sitting on the sidelines, they still felt as though they could not invite the student in the discussion whether because the student was in a different subset of the group at the time,

or if it was just a matter of that student's own learning that had to be continued. One response mentioned time: "I thought about [inviting the student in] after the fact but by then she had started to be more active." Although these answers were telling me there was still more work to be done in this group with encouraging all voices, I was relieved to see the evidence that students were reflecting on their own actions with regards to inviting equal participation from their peers. One student did reflect that they had tried to invite the student in because they had viewed the silence as disagreement and wanted to know why. This brought me back to the first cycle, where these students would self-report that they had said all of their opinions or stuck to their original beliefs although my observations of the groups did not support this. It made me happy that students within the groups themselves were starting to notice this in each other and have the self-efficacy to help those they were noticing evolve their own abilities and encourage their voices. For those who had answered "no" on this question, it was the common belief that there was ample time for everyone to be heard and the group is comfortable enough at this stage to speak with each other. "Everyone already knows each other and the fact that we all felt comfortable allowed for everyone to participate and input into their conversations." This matches with the previously discovered themes around time and sense of belonging.

Question 3: Did you act in a way that aligns with your personal values?

All ten students answering this question answered "yes." This could be a genuine reality, or a cognitive self-serving bias (Cherry 2018). When asked to expand on their answer, one theme that emerged was what those values actually are. Students expressed staying true to themselves, speaking up and having a voice, being reasonable, encouraging people, and listening. These answers were really positive, but I was hoping for some concrete examples of how they used these values in each group setting. One student did tell me that their values are becoming

prominent in their character: “My biggest thing, since the beginning, is understanding how to speak up and have a voice. I did that today and I have been doing that more in my everyday life.” This made me believe that these students are gaining positive impacts from the effects of participating in this action research project.

Another theme was understanding others. Students expressed displaying empathy, taking everyone’s perspectives into consideration, and listening carefully. This coincided with my observation that after the focus group, the students were more centered around what the group could do in terms of advocacy and how they can all take on the tasks of supporting one another best in difficult situations.

The final theme that emerged was that of allowing for a balance of voices to be heard. “I made sure that my voice was heard but I also tried my best to make sure my voice did not overpower others,” one student replied. “I didn’t steamroll people’s ideas and I took time to make sure everyone got a chance to speak,” said another. This made me believe that the students were taking into account advocating for others. Sometimes, advocating for others can be a silent act, in encouraging other voices to be heard through patience and support. This was an interesting revelation for me, and I believe it has been a good practice for the students to understand how to advocate that their voice is important, but how to also practice advocacy for others in encouraging their voices to also be heard.

Question 4: Did you serve as an advocate for yourself?

This question had four choices: Absolutely, In most aspects, In some aspects, or Absolutely not. In analysis, I lumped “Absolutely” and “in most aspects” into a “yes” category and “in some aspects” or “absolutely not” in a “no” category to simply make talking about the answers simpler. 1 of the 10 students responded “no” to this question and elaborated to say “I did

not ask questions about everything I wanted to, but I tried to be a team player.” This makes me think that maybe this student was focusing now too much now on advocating for others instead of for himself. I hope that the balance between the two while in group situations can be something we all learn how to achieve better. I am also wondering if my assumption on why this student did not ask all of their questions is actually because they are making sure everyone else is heard; it could just as easily be attributed to something carrying over from the first cycle, such as a lack of self-efficacy or a diminished sense of belonging to the group.

The other 9 students all responded “yes” to being asked about advocating for themselves. Most of these answers revolved around speaking up and having their opinion be heard. A less-common theme that emerged from these answers was in response to acting on their own values. This is important data because it is showing me that students are learning what advocacy means to them and how to incorporate it for themselves into their daily life.

Question 5: Did you serve as an advocate for someone else?

This question also had four choices: Absolutely, In most aspects, In some aspects, or Absolutely not. In analysis, I lumped “Absolutely” and “in most aspects” into a “yes” category and “in some aspects” or “absolutely not” in a “no” category to simply make talking about the answers simpler. The answers here were 50% “yes” and 50% “no”.

For those who answered “yes,” the common theme was reassuring or helping another member on the team. This ties both with the aforementioned themes of collaboration and sense of belonging to the Student Conduct Leadership Team. I think these are important for the team to prosper, and I am pleased to see they are carried over and made stronger in this cycle.

For those who answered “no,” the common theme was trying to be an advocate, but not necessarily seeing results. “I feel as though I tried my best to invite other people’s opinions but I

am not sure if I was effective” or “I had noticed [she] got skipped and I spoke a few times but nobody heard me” were some quotes from these students. I am wondering if there is a way to talk through with my students the differences between effort and impact and whether or not trying and maybe not accomplishing being an advocate for someone is still as impactful as being successful in that endeavor. I want my students to understand that their voice matters and encouraging other people’s voices matters, even if- and maybe especially so- if they are the only ones pointing out something happening to someone else in a group.

Scale questions: How confident were you in yourself?

These two questions asked how confident, with 10 being the highest, students found themselves before and after entering a group setting. I hypothesized that students would feel more comfortable before entering the group, knowing how group dynamics can influence perceptions and behaviors (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). When ranking their confidence before entering the group, the “7” or “8” category and the “10” each had 4 responses (Figure 3.1), implying that students overall felt like their confidence in themselves before entering the group setting(s) was fairly high. When ranking their confidence after the group setting, one student responded with a “5”, but most responded with a “9” or a “10” (Figure 3.2), indicating that perhaps one student had a difficult encounter with their group setting but overall, the students felt more confident in themselves after being in their group setting.

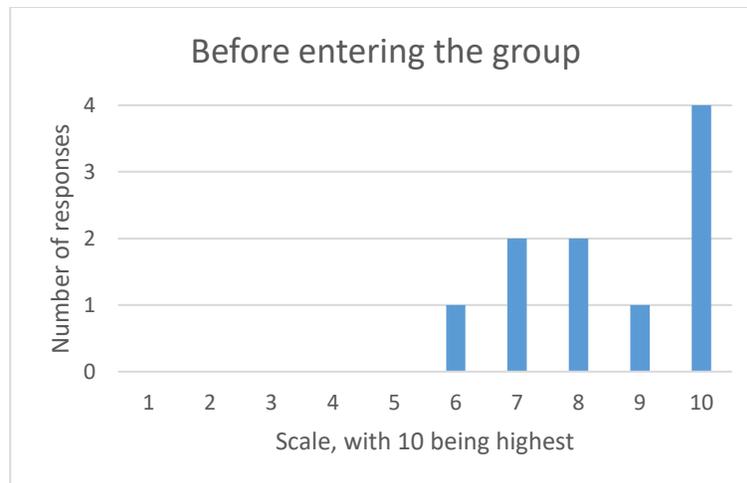


Figure 3.1: Confidence before entering the group

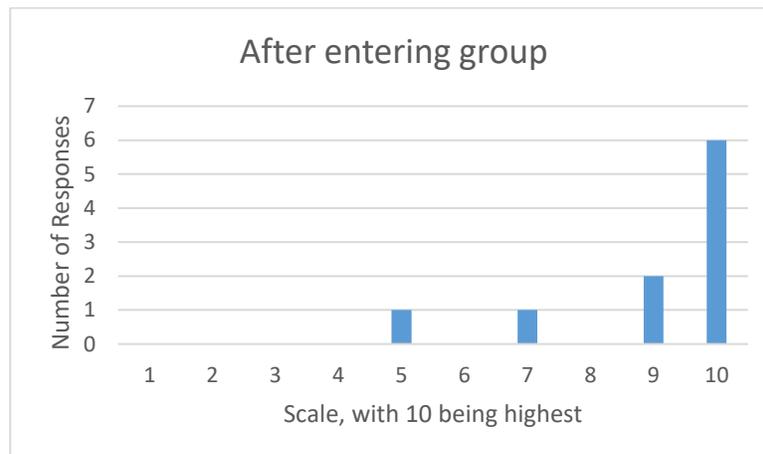


Figure 3.2: Confidence after the group setting

Scale questions: How easy did you find the following?

These questions asked students to use a scale from 1-10, with “10” being the easiest, to represent how easy it was for them to speak as an advocate for themselves and for others. For myself, in starting this project, I would have absolutely said that it was easier for me to advocate for others than for myself. I was curious to see what the students would say. For ranking the ease of advocating for others in their group settings, one student ranked their response at a “4,” indicating that they found this task on the more challenging side of the scale (Figure 3.3).

However, most of the responses gave this task an “8” and the rest of the responses ranked this at

a “9” or “10” (Figure 3.3), implying that overall, students found this an easy task to do within their group setting. Comparatively, when the students were asked to rank the ease of advocating for themselves in their groups, all students ranked this as an “8” or above, with most responses being ranked a “10” (Figure 3.4). This implies that they found advocating for themselves in their groups a very easy thing to do, even easier than advocating for others. One of my students even said “it is always easier to speak on your own behalf.”

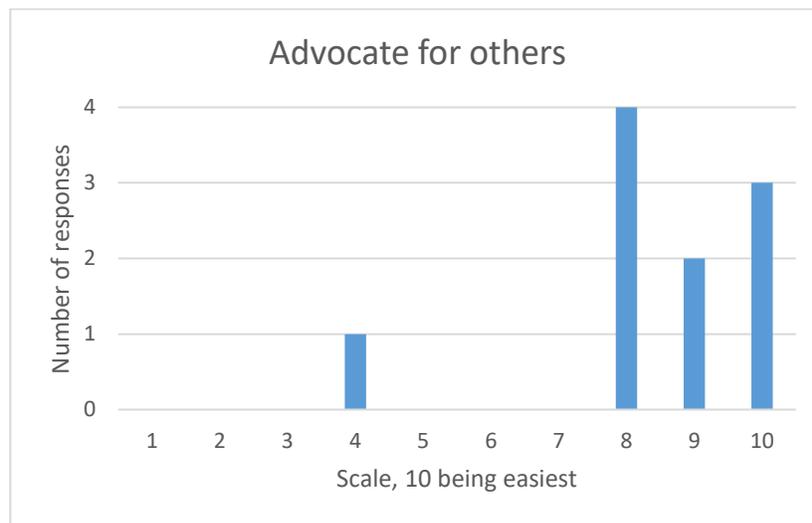


Figure 3.3: Ease of advocating for others in their groups

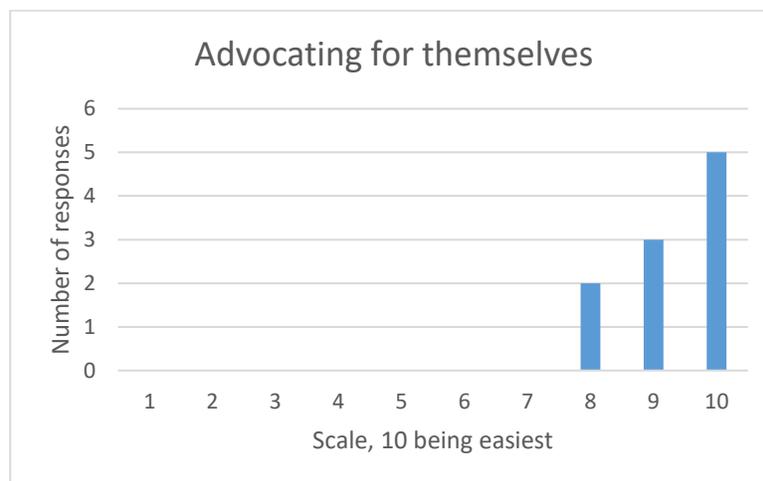


Figure 4.4: Ease of advocating for themselves in their groups

Cycle III: Emergent Themes

Themes that I saw repeated for this cycle were that of time, and sense of belonging. The two new themes I saw emerging from the data this second survey gathered included understanding when to advocate and practicing empathy. Women more often expressed practicing with their core values and aligning with empathy, and the male students more often expressed struggling with when and how to advocate for others.

Getting it “right”: There was a lot of conversation around what an advocate looks like, and how one is an advocate for themselves and others. A lot of the data from my students implied that if they did not advocate for themselves or others, it was because they did not understand the need, did not believe the situation called for an advocate, and wanted other voices to be able to be heard. I fear that this hesitancy around when to or when not to advocate for themselves and others could be detrimental to their endeavors in the future, and this is something I would like to talk through with my students. I think for me, the effort of trying to advocate for someone else can mean a lot to them. Advocating for myself is something that I need to continue working on because I have learned through this project that my voice is just as valuable as those around me. I want my students to have similar takeaways that encourage them to use their voices both for the benefit of others, but also for themselves, and I do not want a fear of “being wrong” hold them back from trying.

Understanding others: Another theme I saw emerge in my students’ responses was this sense of practicing empathy and understanding of those around them to know their teammate’s needs and how to best support them. This is an important facet of advocacy because you cannot hope to bring attention to someone else’s needs if you yourself are not attuned to them. I am glad

my students are able to start connecting deeper to how they need advocates to be there for them, and how they can reciprocate those sentiments with the members of their groups.

Cycle III Limitations: There were again not as many opportunities to hand out the surveys as I had originally planned. While I had established a system to at least counteract the few opportunities to collect data through my first cycle, those same opportunities were not as present in the second semester. As it is a survey, there is still self-reporting bias to be taken into consideration. The timeline of this cycle was also condensed because I was not aware that the deadline for this cycle to be complete was the end of March; I had mistakenly believed it was the end of April.

Cycle IV

Cycle IV Methodology- Focus Group

Sub-Cycle 4a: Reflect

Because I had changed the survey, I wanted to gather the group together again to reflect back on the values we had designated as our core team values and see how those had shaped the second semester. I also wanted to explore how the use of the word “advocate” instead of “ally” had shaped their responses for the revised survey.

Sub-Cycle 4b: Plan

I organized a focus group (Appendix D) to reconvene with 5 of my students to ask their overall opinions on my project and what takeaways they were able to gain on it. We reflected back to where they felt their leadership was at the beginning of the year as compared to now, especially with regards to advocating for themselves and for others.

Sub-Cycle 4c: Act

I recorded the focus group to help me pull directly from the students what they believed had worked over the course of the year and what recommendations they would make for future studies. I administered open response questions (Appendix E) in the beginning to guide our discussion. I also handed out a final survey (Appendix F) to see how the students measured their own progress on advocacy, using their voices, and general leadership styles now compared to at the beginning of this project.

Sub-Cycle 4d: Observe

I observed gratitude from the students on being able to partake in this project over the course of the year. I observed clear growth in these students over the course of the year, and I observed the value it had brought to all of us in allowing us to reflect and develop. I compiled the transcription of the focus group to help me compose recommendations for the SCLT and the Office as a whole moving forward.

Cycle IV: Data Analysis

I pulled some important quotes from the focus group that I wanted to connect here with my research project:

“At times in the past, I’ve tried to say something and no one listened and it made me reluctant to try to keep saying anything, but I’ve learned that that doesn’t really mean anything and if you have something valuable to share, you just need to say it.” –student 5, female

“I feel like I can achieve all of our values here in this space and I feel very empowered to be confident in what I say and the choices we all make together so it’s great how I can see that happening here but maybe it isn’t in other spaces.” –student 6, female

“I didn’t know my leadership style well because I feel like I fluctuate a lot but I feel like this study has helped me find a good way I can strive to be every time so that I can expect something of myself and hold myself to that. That’s been a really big takeaway for me and something I had never thought of before.” –student 5, female

“Because of the Board experience, I have definitely become more of an advocate for certain things, like when it comes to ethics, for example. It inspired me to start working

with the MeToo movement as an advocate for sexual assault awareness.” –student 3, male

“I think the project helped me to recognize the different ways that I advocate, like who it is for. I feel like I have always been comfortable advocating for myself but hesitant to advocate for others because I saw it as speaking for others and I don’t like when people speak for me on my behalf so I’ve always been kind of hesitant to advocate for other people but I think through the SCLT I have learned that it is important to advocate for others in certain cases, specifically when other Board members might not understand the perspective of the student. I feel like you have to speak to advocate for them and their experience.” –student 2, female

“Part of the challenge I think was to have the students on the other end to understand that we are also advocating for them and supporting them through this process so I think that’s been a little more challenging than advocating for myself because I think I have learned that through this group so now I’m trying to learn ways, maybe when they come in, to try and set the tone and make sure that they know we are actually here to support them”-student 6, female

These were just some of the quotes that I could pull from my focus group transcription that made me believe the students were actively engaged in claiming their part of this learning and made this experience valuable for the development of their voices. They were articulating understanding better what shape advocacy took in their daily lives, and how this experience empowered them to bring advocacy into their leadership styles.

As for the final survey that depicted the measurement of their growth from the beginning of this project in several areas, two students exclaimed “I circled a lot of 10s!” A “10” was the number that correlated to “Strongly Agree” and students were choosing this answer in response to questions that asked them if now, at the end of the project, it was easier for them to speak up for others/themselves, to understand group dynamics, and to understand their own personal leadership skills from the beginning of the year. It also correlated to agreeing that the students felt as though they developed skills through this project and had a better understanding of how to empower the voices of themselves and others, among other things. For the graphs of these

questions visually displaying this data, please refer to Appendix G. Overall, the analysis was that this project had been valuable for all of its participants.

Cycle IV: Emergent Themes

The two themes I saw emerging from the data revolved around when voices were heard or not heard, and what the students were taking away from the project about advocacy.

Voices being heard: I asked the students to reflect on when their voice had and had not been heard, and they mostly felt like the group had always listened to what they had to say. A couple of reasons voices might have gone unheard was if the group physically did not hear what they had said, or when different contexts came into play, such as when the group was newer and still learning together how the processes worked. For the most part, the students expressed always feeling as though the group was a space where their individual voice would be heard and that gave them the confidence to practice advocacy in other areas of their lives as well.

Advocacy takeaways: Advocacy for these students popped up in the group when they found themselves defending other students on the SCLT who maybe had been talked over accidentally. They also described advocating for the alleged offender students sitting on the other side of the Hearing Boards and making sure those students felt supported throughout the conduct process. The students described the team itself as a safe space, valuing each other's voices equally with no regards to rank or gender. "People always ask me how I feel and even if they have a different view, they approach it as 'I understand your thoughts but I feel...'" said student 6. It was a respectful atmosphere for the members of the SCLT, and this helped them understand how to advocate for themselves, too. They expressed being able to share their opinions because they felt valued by their teammates. "I think being on the SCLT has led me to be the advocate in other spaces that I am today" indicated student 3.

The purpose of this focus group was to allow for students to gather and reflect together about what participating in this project had meant for each of them. I think it is important that we had this space because it allowed us to articulate what we had learned together and what we hoped to continue moving forward. Students were better able to understand their values and how those can be implemented into using their voices.

Cycle IV Limitations: Not all of the students who had been participating in my research throughout the year were able to attend this focus group, leaving out some voices that may have had critical input.

Recommendations

This action research project was beneficial to my students, and may benefit the Office of Ethical Development and Restorative Practices as well. I have learned a lot about my own advocacy and how I wish to strengthen its weak spots as I move forward in life. My students have learned what advocating for others and themselves means individually to each of them and how they can incorporate it into other areas where they serve on groups. I believe it has been valuable to them and their self-advocacy journey. This research might impact how future GA's work to continue understanding how to encourage group cohesion and advocacy within the Student Conduct Leadership Team

Recommendations for Future Research: Because my team was mostly female students, it was incredibly difficult to track any kind of gender differences as I just did not have an adequate male population sample size. I would love for this research to be used to delve deeper into gender roles and see how, if at all, they play into people feeling comfortable using their voice both for their own advocacy and for the advocacy of others. I would also suggest to future GA's of OEDRP to research how confidence can be built in the students throughout the year so that

their self-efficacy can be raised within the group itself and as they serve on Boards. Another source of potential future research would be on how to increase group cohesion within the Student Conduct Leadership Team by strengthening each member's sense of belonging on the team.

Recommendations for the Office of Ethical Development and Restorative Practices:

Based on what I have learned from this project, students are more likely to speak up if they feel that they have the proper space and support to do that. I would advise the Office to find ways to bring the group together as a whole more often than just once a month, because I think this would really advance the member's sense of belonging to the Team, as well as their sense of support and camaraderie for each other. I would also recommend that there are more Boards each semester, in order to keep the members remembering that they are working for a common goal and keep them activated within the Student Conduct Leadership Team.

Recommendations for Personal Learning: Through this project, I have come to understand my own weaknesses in self-advocacy and how I can better help myself strengthen those. For instance, I have learned that I really struggle going up against authority. People with different titles, or people who are older, tend to create a stifling response in me. This could stem from a lack of a sense of belonging to the same group; however, when I am working with these people, it would be important for me to keep in mind that we are all working for a same common goal whether that be for the group itself or the enterprise or the country. I hope that this will allow me to change that sense of belonging in myself and use it to remind myself that my voice is equally as important for the common goal and values and it deserves to be heard.

Conclusion

Overall, I am very proud of this project and the impact it made on myself and my students. I was not sure that my students were feeling impacts of it, but as it continued their gratitude in participating in something like this was evident. They each expressed learning something new about themselves or their leadership style, and I know I did as well. I learned that it is okay, and encouraged, to share your voice when it is important to you, regardless of rank or gender or any other varying group factors. There was no evidence anywhere that gender played a role in the students using their voices, as I had originally hypothesized. I believe participating in this project will encourage these students to continue developing their voices in group settings and be able to stand up for themselves when their validity is questioned. By working through my cycles together, my focus group understood what resonates with them that pulls them to speak, so they can harness those passions to fuel social justice change. I believe this project was successful in that each student articulated a better understanding of themselves and their leadership skills by the end of the year. If conflict arises in future group settings, my hope is that these students will be able to face it with their heads held high instead of being silenced into submission after the work we have done throughout this year on building up their voices and confidences with regards to taking up advocacy, for themselves and for others.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire 1

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. While your name is important for me to know, your answers will not be shared with anyone else and pseudonyms will be used if I must refer to your answers in my Action Research project. If you are interested in following up with me personally about your answers to this survey, please email me at jdesousa@sandiego.edu and I would be happy to work through your insights with you one-on-one!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. I feel as though there was a situation in the group today that I could have handled better.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, please explain: -

2. I feel as though I served as an ally for someone else in the group today.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Please explain why or why not

3. I feel as though I served as an ally for myself today.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Please explain why or why not

4. I feel as though this group meeting would have gone differently if I had had different resources.

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please explain why or why not

On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the hardest and 10 being the easiest, please rate the following based on how you feel after today's group session:

- 1. Speaking in defense of others
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 2. Speaking in defense of yourself
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 3. Stating an opinion that is the same as the group's
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 4. Stating an opinion that is different from the group's
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Is there anything else you would like to add about any group dynamics that presented themselves today?

Appendix B

Focus Group I Script

Hello everyone, and thank you for joining me for this focus group. I wanted to bring you all together because I had realized that the answers coming from your first round of surveys seemed not to indicate that conflicts were arising in group settings, which is contrary to what I have observed. I am thinking that my survey had used wording that was difficult to understand, and thus led to some confusion in your answers. For example, I think the use of the word “ally” was wrong and should instead be replaced by “advocate”. I am hoping that this will be a safe space for you to share your experiences with the group, and so I must ask for complete confidentiality. What happens in this room should stay in this room- if I am to bring it into my Action Research project, I will be using pseudonyms to protect your anonymity.

I have some questions that I think will help guide our dialogue. I was hoping we could start talking about what kinds of conflicts were seen to arise because of the group dynamics. Where did they stem from? After discussing these kinds of incidents, how can we, as a group, come up with some strategies that we can use to strengthen their own voices? What made you all decide to intervene when you saw a conflict occurring- either to someone else, but perhaps more importantly, for yourself? Was it easier for you to defend others, or yourselves? Why do you think that would be? How can we make it so that it is easier for everyone to serve as an ally for others, but also to serve as advocates for themselves?

Appendix C

Questionnaire II

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. While your name is important for me to know, your answers will not be shared with anyone else and pseudonyms will be used if I must refer to your answers in my Action Research project. If you are interested in following up with me personally about your answers to this survey, please email me at jdesousa@sandiego.edu and I would be happy to work through your insights with you one-on-one!

Name: _____ Date: _____

5. How many people were in your group today? _____

6. Did you notice moments where someone was not involved in the group conversation?

- a. Yes b. No

If yes, did you play a role in inviting that group member's voice to be heard?

If no, what factors do you think led to everyone participating?

7. Did you act in a way that aligns with your personal values today?

- a. Yes b. No

Please explain what values you acted or did not act upon, and why or why not

8. I feel as though I served as an advocate for myself today.

- a. Absolutely
- b. In most aspects
- c. In some aspects
- d. Absolutely not

Please explain your answer:

9. I feel as though I served as an advocate for someone else today.

- a. Absolutely
- b. In most aspects
- c. In some aspects
- d. Absolutely not

Please explain your answer

10. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, please indicate your confidence in yourself going into this group:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, please indicate your confidence in yourself coming out of this group:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If there was a change, please indicate what might have led to this change:

On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the hardest and 10 being the easiest, please rate the following based on how you feel after today's group session:

5. Speaking as an advocate for others

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Speaking as an advocate for yourself

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Is there anything else you would like to add about any group dynamics that presented themselves today?

Appendix D

Focus Group II Script

Thank you all so much for participating in my Action Research project throughout this year! I deeply appreciate all of your reflections and insights that helped make this project so successful. I wanted to use this space as an opportunity to talk about our common takeaways and see what learning, if any occurred. The discussion will be guided by these four open response questions (Appendix E). I would also love your overall feedback about this project and how it was conducted. This can include any recommendations for future research, or things I might have been able to do differently to further your development. I have one final, quick survey (Appendix F) based on how you feel after this experience compared to how you felt beginning this Action Research project with me. While your name is important for me to know, your answers will not be shared with anyone and pseudonyms will be used if I must refer to your answers in my Action Research project.

Appendix E

Final Reflections

Open Response Questions

These questions will be used to facilitate our discussion on what takeaways this project gave to us and how we developed from it.

1. Please reflect on a time that you felt as though your voice was not heard within this group. Describe what happened, how it made you feel, and if you changed anything moving forward.
2. Please reflect on a time that you felt as though your voice was heard within this group. Describe what happened, how it made you feel, and if you changed anything moving forward.
3. Do you feel as though your gender had any influence in whether you were heard or not heard within this group. Please explain why or why not.
4. Finally, what, if anything, have you learned about advocacy and self-advocacy through this project?

Appendix F**Final Survey**

On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 10 being Strongly Agree, please answer how you feel about each of the following statements.

1. It is easier now for me to speak up for others.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. It is easier now for me to speak up for myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. It is easier now for me to understand group dynamics.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. It is easier now for me to understand my own personal leadership style.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. I developed skills through attending this workshop that I will be able to carry with me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. I feel as though my voice has been strengthened.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. I have a better understanding of how to empower other women to use their own voices

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. I have a better understanding of how to empower myself to use my own voice

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. I feel more confident about my leadership abilities in a group setting

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. This Action Research experience was valuable to me

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix G

Focus Group II, Cycle IV Graphs

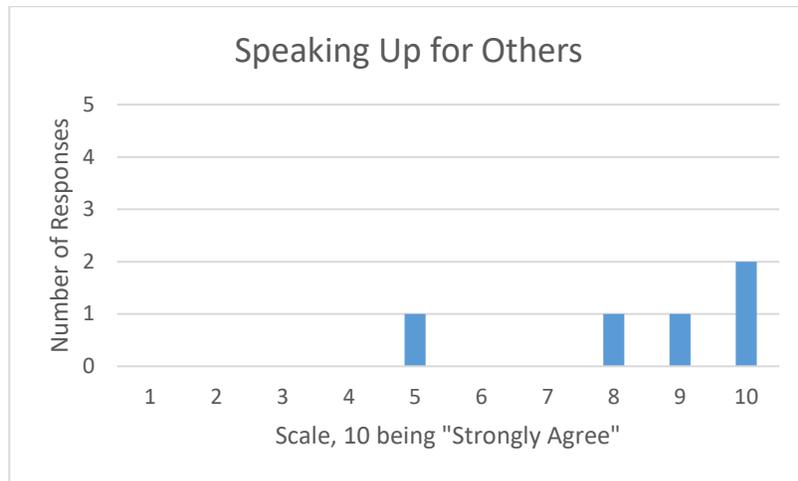


Figure 4.1: It is easier after the project for the student to speak up for others

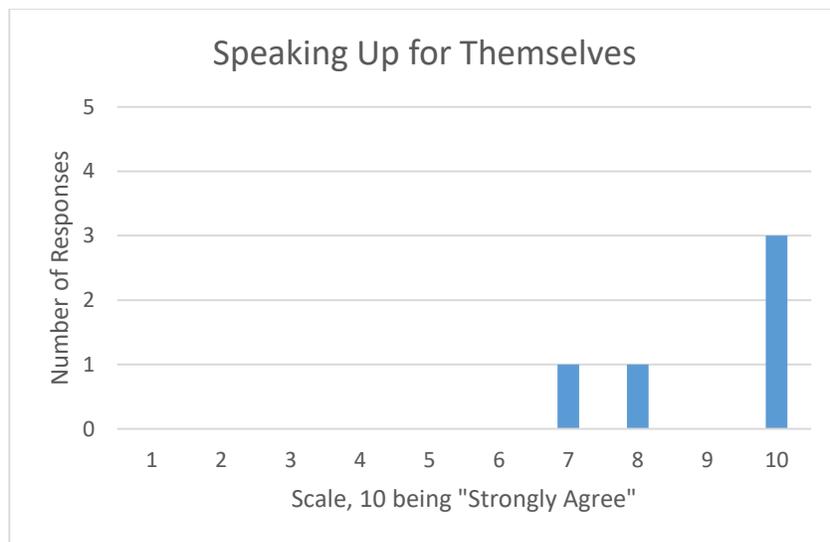


Figure 4.2: It is easier now to speak up for yourself

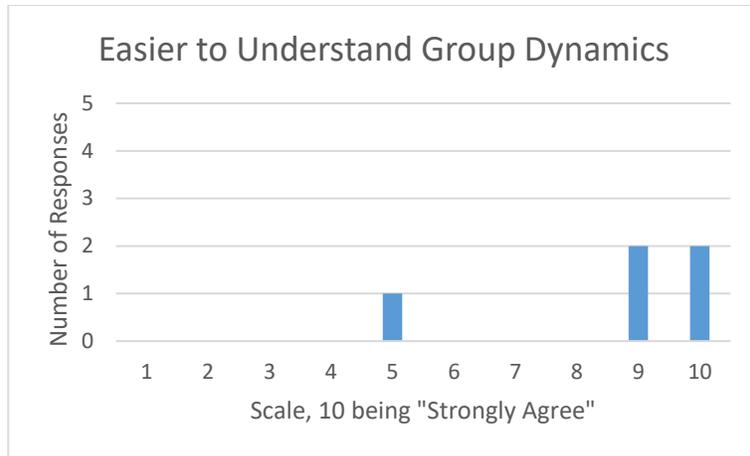


Figure 4.3: *It is easier now for the student to understand group dynamics*

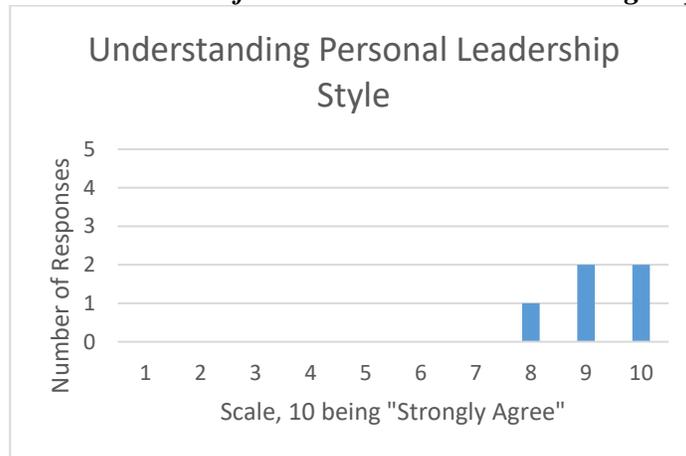


Figure 4.4: *It is easier now for the student to understand their personal leadership style.*

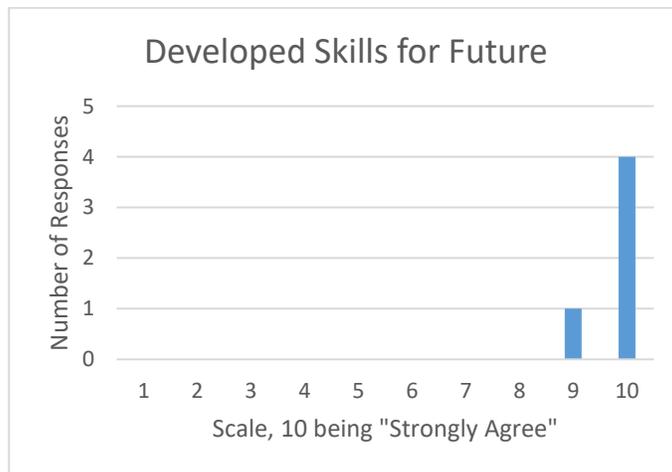


Figure 4.5: *The student developed skills throughout participating in this project that they will be able to carry with them.*

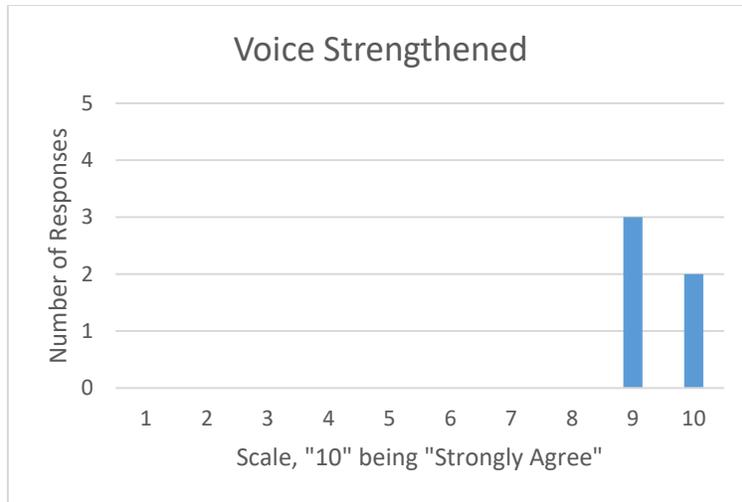


Figure 4.6: *The student feels as though their voice has been strengthened.*

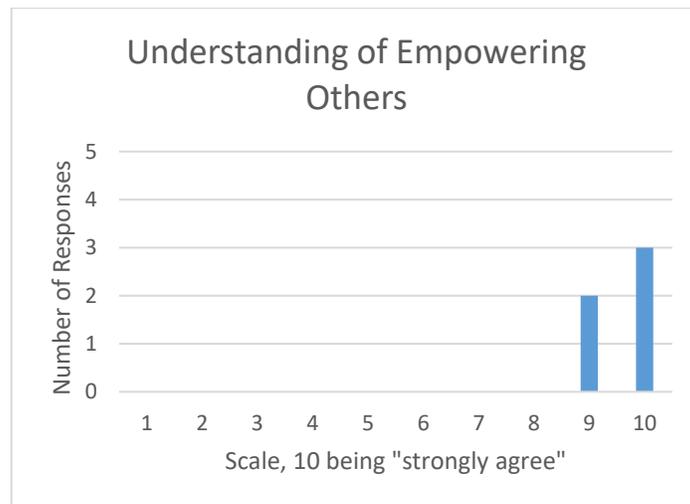


Figure 4.7: *The student has a better understanding of how to empower other students to use their voices.*

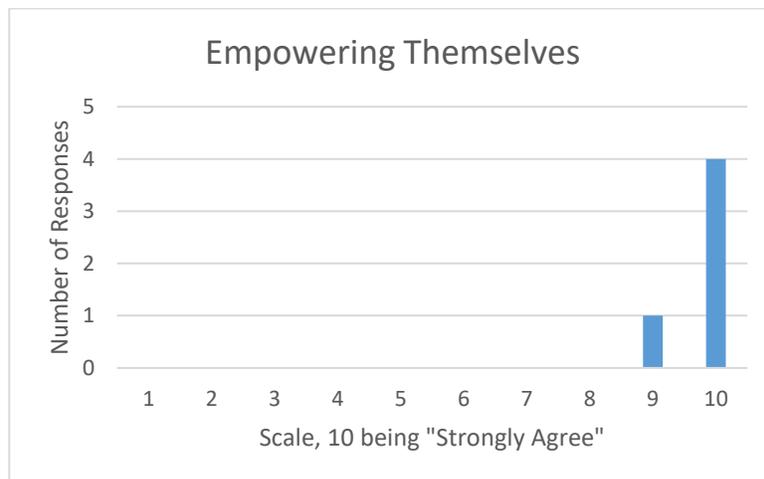


Figure 4.8: The student has a better understanding of how to empower themselves to use their own voice.



Figure 4.9: The students feel more confident about their leadership abilities in a group setting.



Figure 4.10: This Action Research project was valuable to the student.