

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOTIVATION OF ATTENDEES AT CAL POLY'S  
"CHANGE THE STATUS QUO" CONFERENCE

A Senior Project

presented to

the Faculty of the Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration Department

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Science

by

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March 2013

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## ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOTIVATION OF ATTENDEES AT CAL POLY'S

“CHANGE THE STATUS QUO” CONFERENCE

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MARCH, 2013

The social activism community exists to address the collective responsibility of meeting needs and fighting for the rights of the disadvantaged and/or marginalized populations. The Change the Status Quo conference aims to educate, motivate, and activate attendees. The purpose of this study was to measure the motivations of attendees at the Change the Status Quo conference at Cal Poly to become involved in social activism. The study was conducted through a questionnaire distributed and collected during the final workshop of the conference. The findings from 72 participants indicated that most were female and college students. Most were also frequently involved in social activism prior to the conference. Those attending by free choice were more likely to desire high levels of involvement, and the most impactful topic was gender equality. Recommendations to the conference committee include: consider new ways to better market the conference to males, and provide more promotion to individuals not commonly involved in social activism.

Keywords: Social activism, professional conferences, motivations, social justice, volunteerism, social work

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Background of the Study

Social welfare, according to Romanyshyn (1971), can be defined in two parts: financial assistance and other services to the disadvantaged, and the “collective responsibility to meet universal needs of the population” (p. 3). The efforts to provide social welfare are commonly known as social work. Social work in America began during the colonial period (Axinn & Levin, 1975). Colonists coming from England in the mid 1600’s brought with them many customs, including laws to promote the welfare of the poor. For example, Rhode Island utilized England’s Elizabethan Poor Law, which focused on the public’s responsibility for the poor. Since this time, the realm of social work has been growing in both scope and context. In the early 1900’s social work became a real profession, and by 1917 the profession had its first major text: *Social Diagnosis* by Mary Richmond (Abramovitz, 1998).

Today, the scope of social work extends beyond professionalism and into activism. Social activism involves an array of like-minded people, passionate about promoting the welfare of the less fortunate. While this passion often manifests itself in the form of volunteer work, it can also come in the form of social activism conferences, much like the Change the Status Quo Conference at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

The Change the Status Quo conference is an annual gathering of people who share a passion for making a difference in their community and the world. The conference encourages participants to “use education to make lasting changes” and

attempts to “give participants tangible tools to be effective advocates for social change” (Cal Poly Student Life & Leadership, 2012, para. 2). The theme of the conference is to “Educate, Motivate, and then Activate” (Cal Poly Student Life & Leadership, para. 2). Of these three goals, motivation stands out as an uncontrollable factor for the conference creators, because it is rooted in the participant’s intrinsic values. According to Batson, Ahmad, and Tsang (2002), motivation to act for the public good comes from an individual’s underlying values. While understanding an individual’s values according to motivation could greatly benefit conference creators, studies have shown that the relationship between values and volunteering is weak and inconsistent (Hoge, Zech, McNamara, & Donahue, 1998; Wilson & Janoski, 1995).

Therefore, a good starting point for understanding how well conferences motivate is to measure the change in a participant’s motivation to become involved in social activism. There is a lack of literature on motivational conferences, and not much research has been conducted on motivational conference practices. This study directly benefits social activism organizations by helping to understand how conferences impact motivation in participating individuals.

### Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: EBSCOHost, Expanded Academic ASAP, and psychINFO. This review of literature is

organized into the following topic areas: social activism motivations, and motivations for conference attendance.

Social activism motivations. No person was ever born a social activist or volunteer. At some point in their lives they made the decision to become one. That decision, like every decision we make, was preceded by motivations. This section will discuss the possible motivations behind why people get involved with social and volunteer work.

Motives, as described by Lewin, are “goal-directed forces induced by threats or opportunities related to one’s values” (as cited in Batson, et al., 2002, p. 430). Values essentially are “relative preferences” (Batson et al., p. 430), meaning that a value is a preference unique to an individual and based on their own experiences and deductions. Motivations can be grouped into two main categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. According to Ratelle, Guay, Vallerand, Larose, and Senecal (2007), intrinsic motivation involves performing an action solely for the sake of the action itself, while extrinsic motivation entails doing something for reasons other than the action. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations can manifest themselves in countless ways, so it’s necessary that a more detailed approach to understanding motivations be taken.

Understanding what people value is crucial to understanding what motivates them. One of the most apparent and universal values is a person’s own self-interest. This value is called egoism, which, as described by Campbell, is the belief that all human action is invariably attempting to increase one’s own self-benefit (as cited in Batson et al., 2002). According to this creed, any act done by a person for the benefit of another, or a community, is done because doing so will inevitably lead to the promotion of their own

welfare (Batson et al.). Batson explains that while self-interest will always remain a strong motivator, modern research suggests that people are capable of acting for reasons other than their own benefit (as cited in Batson et al.). Batson goes on to explain these other possible motivators:

Three other broad classes of motives have been proposed that involve interests outside ourselves: *altruism*, motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of one or more other individuals as individuals; *collectivism*, motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of a group; and *principlism*, motivation with the ultimate goal of upholding some moral principle, such as justice. (as cited in Batson et al.)

Researchers have also considered these perspectives by grouping values as either individualistic or collectivist in the context of volunteering. Collectivism is easily linked to altruism for its “other centered” motivation for volunteering; while individualism reflects a more egotistical approach, as people expressed more self-focused motivations, like career-oriented goals (Finkelstein, 2010).

While values are important to understanding what motivates people to volunteer and participate in social work, they are not reliable predictors. Studies have shown that the relationship between values and volunteering is weak and inconsistent (Hoge et al., 1998; Wilson & Janoski, 1995). There are many reasons values are poor predictors of volunteering. Volunteering comes in many shapes, as do the people who volunteer, so it is not effective to use broad, overarching questions in research to capture these differences (Wilson, 2000).

Aside from values, researchers have found more empirical reasons for volunteering. Wuthnow (1995) found that children learn a wider scope of cultural understandings by parents setting an example. This serves as a motivator for the children to volunteer later in life. In separate studies, Astin and Damico found that children involved in volunteering in their high-school years learn “pro-social attitudes” which leads them to volunteer more in their later life (as cited in Wilson, 2000, pp. 218-219).

Awareness of demographic differences further helps paint a picture of why people get involved with social activism. Herzog, Kahn, Morgan, and Jackson (1989) found that the rate of volunteering decreases between adolescence to adulthood. While the rate of volunteering decreases during this time, high risk volunteering is the exception, attracting mainly younger people (Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991).

Motivations for conference attendance. Severt, Wang, Chen, and Breiter (2006) defined conferences and conventions as events with “educational programming, networking activities, and an exhibition” (p. 399). These programs and activities are external factors that motivate people to attend conferences. While most conferences are the same in essential make-up, people attend and don’t attend for a variety of external and internal reasons. This section will discuss motivational factors to attend conferences.

According to Butler (1999) people have an intrinsic desire to acquire skills and knowledge. This desire is reflected in the motivations of people to attend conferences. According to a variety of studies the accrual of educational benefits is one of the main motivators for people to attend conferences (Lee & Back, 2009; Oppermann, 1998; Severt et al., 2006). It has also been found that people who feel like they received educational benefit are more satisfied with the conference itself, which leads to a desire

to return and even tell others (Severt et al., 2006). People come with an expectancy to learn at these conferences, but according to Kim, Lee, and Kim (2012) the desire to learn depends on the history of the participant's attendance. Kim et al., found that first time attendees most value professional education, while second time attendees value social networking over education.

Along with education, social networking was also found to be one of the strongest motivational factors for conference attendance (Lee & Back, 2009; Oppermann, 1998; Severt et al., 2006). These conferences provide opportunities for like-minded people to convene and share knowledge, ideas, and opinions. According to Butler (1999), these events allow people not only the chance to expand their social networks, but to create new professional contacts. While social networking has been found to be a primary motivator, Severt et al. (2006) found that social networking is not strongly linked to one's satisfaction with a conference or convention. Thus, people look forward to networking opportunities at a conference, but do not base their opinion of the conference on the networking experience, or lack thereof.

A third possible motivating factor for attendance to a conference is professional opportunities and activities within the field. Severt et al. (2007) found this to be the most prominent motivator for attendees of a regional conference. The concept of activities and opportunities as a motivator includes "association related activities, business activities, career enhancement, and self esteem enhancement" (p. 405). This shows that people not only go to conferences to learn and connect, but also to become actively involved and find new opportunities in their field. While Severt et al. (2007) found this to be the most important motivational factor, networking and education were also among the top four.

A final but also very influential factor of conference attendance is the site of the conference. In Yoo and Chon (2008) found “destination stimuli” to be the number one factor for conference attendance (p. 118). This factor consists of values such as: the weather at the location, attractiveness of the destination, and getting away from a routine schedule (Yoo & Chon, p.119). While the destination itself can be a strong motivator for conference attendance, accessibility to the location is also very powerful (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). The distance of the conference can be a strong inhibiting factor for people. With an increase in distance comes an increase in cost, and high travel costs play a major role in the decision to attend (Oppermann, 1998).

Summary. Extensive research has been done regarding intrinsic motivations. Individualistic theories promote the idea that all actions are ultimately done for the benefit of the individual, while collectivistic theories suggest that people can do things out of genuine concern for the welfare of others. While these ideals can and have been extensively debated, research shows that these values are poor predictors of how people are motivated to volunteer and participate in social work. The motivations attributed to involvement in social activism and volunteer work are numerous and complicated. While it is important to realize the difficulty in measuring human values as motivations, efforts should be continued and extended.

The study of motivations for conference attendance covers a more objective side of motivations. Why people attend conferences is the main question observed, and some of the influential external factors include: educational benefits, social networking, and professional opportunities. While these are the top motivators for people to *attend*

conferences, there has been very little research done on conferences that exist *to motivate*.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to measure the motivations of attendees of the “Change the Status Quo” conference at Cal Poly to become involved in social activism.

### Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How often were attendees involved in social activism activities before the conference?
2. To what extent does this change by the end of the conference?
3. To what extent do motivations differ between those in attendance under their own volition from those in attendance to fulfill a requirement?
4. To what extent does the conference change the opinions of first time attendees on social activism?
5. Which parts of the conference did attendees find most impactful?
6. What common characteristics are shared among those attendees most motivated to be involved in social activism in the long term?

### Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters.

1. Subjects for this study were attendees of Cal Poly's Change the Status Quo conference.
2. Age, gender, motivations, and social activism history of attendees were analyzed.
3. The data were collected on February 23, 2013.
4. Information for this study was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire.

### Limitations

This study was limited to the following factors:

1. The instrument used in this study was not tested for validity and reliability.
2. The instrument was administered and collected at several different locations, making it impossible for the researcher to oversee all administration.
3. Not all who attended the beginning of the conference were present at the end to complete the questionnaire.
4. The attendees may have had an inadequate time period to complete the questionnaire.
5. The study reflected only the attendees of the Change the Status Quo conference and not those of other social activism conferences.

## Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed participants answered honestly and to the best of their ability.
2. It was assumed participants were registered attendees for the conference.
3. It was assumed participants were over 18 years of age.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined as used in this study:

Conferences and conventions. Events with “educational programming, networking activities, and an exhibition...” (Severt, et al., 2006, p. 399)

Motivations. “goal-directed forces induced by threats or opportunities related to one’s values” (as cited in Batson et al., 2002, p. 430)

Social welfare. financial assistance and other services to the disadvantaged, and the “collective responsibility to meet universal needs of the population” (Romanyshyn, 1971, p. 3)

Values. “relative preferences” (Batson et al., 2002, p. 430)

## Chapter 2

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to measure the motivations of attendees of the Change the Status Quo conference at Cal Poly to become involved in social activism. This chapter on methods and procedures is organized into the following sections: description of subjects, description of instrument, description of procedures, and method of data analysis.

#### Description of Subjects

The subjects of this study were the attendees of the 2013 “Change the Status Quo” social activism conference at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The event hosted 200 attendees and was held on February 22-23, 2013. A sample size of 132 was selected using Raosoft® sample size calculator for the questionnaire. The conference is defined as a gathering for people who “share a passion for making a difference in their community and the world” (Cal Poly Student Life & Leadership, 2012, para. 1). The majority of participants were Cal Poly students, while a minority were older than college age, anywhere from mid twenties to late 60’s. Social activism experience in participants ranged from none to full time employment. All attendees were potential participants in the study. Subjects were selected using convenience sampling.

### Description of Instrument

The instrument for this study was a double-sided self administered questionnaire used to measure the change in motivations of “Change the Status Quo” attendees to get involved in social activism (see Appendix A). The researcher, in conjunction with Cal Poly Student Life & Leadership staff, developed the instrument. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions with all but one being close ended. Five of the questions were demographic related, while four others measured motivations and involvement with social activism. One question addressed attendee opinions of conference themes. The instrument opened with a thank you to the subject and a notification that participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous.

Question one asked if the participant had ever attended the “Change the Status Quo” conference before. Question two asked if they were fulfilling a requirement/ received external benefit (i.e. class credit) from attending the conference. Questions three and four consisted of two multiple-choice questions examining the participant’s frequency (desired frequency for post-conference) of involvement in social activism activities before and after the conference. Question 5 was also a multiple choice question that asked how the participants desire to get involved in social activism has changed as a result of the conference.

For question six, a five point Likert-type scale was used to measure the motivational strength that each conference theme had on the participant. The scale, used to rate the motivational strength of each theme was rated on a scale from one to five, one representing very un motivating and 5 representing very motivating. Question seven consisted of a multiple-choice item asking how the participant heard about this

conference. Questions eight and ten were multiple-choice format, while question nine was open-ended format. These demographic questions determined if the participant was a college student, their age, and gender.

The instrument was pilot tested by eight people who had previously attended the Change the Status Quo Conference; from the pilot test, no changes were made to the questionnaire. The instrument and informed consent letter were reviewed and approved by the Cal Poly Human Subjects committee on January 20, 2013. The informed consent letter was attached to all instruments. It indicated the purpose of the study, contact information, and the absence of risks associated with participation (see Appendix B).

#### Description of Procedures

On November 1, 2012, a meeting was held between the researcher and the Change the Status Quo (CSQ) planning committee. As a result of this meeting, permission to conduct the study was established, as well as a research partnership between the CSQ planning committee and Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. After partnership was established, the researcher developed the questionnaire necessary for conducting the study.

The conference was held on February 22-23, 2013. The questionnaire was distributed and collected during the final workshop of the conference. With the help of CSQ organizers, questionnaires were distributed to every attendee present. After being seated, participants then completed the questionnaire and returned it to CSQ organizers and research assistants. Once the questionnaires were collected, all data were entered into

a Microsoft Excel database spreadsheet. Data were evaluated and analyzed according to each question on the questionnaire.

### Method of Data Analysis

After all questionnaires were collected, data were entered into Microsoft Excel. Each item on the questionnaire was designed to answer one of the six research questions. To answer the first research question regarding the subject's frequency of social activism involvement prior to the conference, the frequencies and percentages of question three were calculated. To answer the second research question related to desired frequency of post-conference involvement, the frequencies and percentages of question four were calculated.

To answer the research question regarding how motivations differ between those voluntarily attending the conference and those attending due to a requirement or for external benefit, frequencies and percentages were calculated, then a cross tabulation was created using the data from questions two and five. The research question related to the change in opinions on social activism for first-time attendees was also addressed by calculating frequencies and percentages of questions one and five. Data from these questions were also examined through cross tabulation.

A five-point Likert-type scale was employed to address the research question regarding which parts of the conference the participant's found most impactful. Measures of central tendency (i.e., mean and standard deviation) were used to evaluate the data. The frequencies and percentages of each variable were also calculated. The demographic information found in questions eight through ten were used to help answer the final research question, regarding which characteristics are found in those who desire a high level of involvement in social activism activities. The frequency and percentage data from these demographic questions were calculated, and cross tabulations were formulated.

## Chapter 3

### PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to measure the motivations of attendees of the “Change the Status Quo” conference at Cal Poly to become involved in social activism. Data were collected on February 23, 2013, after the final workshop of the conference. The researcher worked in collaboration with conference staff to administer the questionnaire in different classrooms on the campus of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. The subjects were those in attendance of the conference. A sample size of 72 participants represented the population of approximately 200 conference attendees (36%). This chapter is organized into the following sections: demographics, pre and post-conference social activism involvement, change in involvement desire, impactfulness of conference topics, and characteristics of those desiring a high level of involvement.

#### Demographics

Data included information on collegiate status, age, and gender. Of the 72 people who participated in this study, there were more college students ( $n = 51$ , 70.83%) than those not in college ( $n = 21$ , 29.17%). Females ( $n = 44$ , 66.67%) in attendance largely outnumbered males ( $n = 20$ , 27.78%) and those who preferred not to respond ( $n = 3$ , 4.17%) or provided an illegible response ( $n = 1$ , 1.39%). Subjects also varied in age, with the largest age group being ages 20-22. The complete breakdown of age groups can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1  
Age of Attendees by Frequency and Percentage

Age	<i>f</i>	%
<16	1	1.39
17-19	14	19.44
20-22	33	45.83
23-25	10	13.89
26-28	6	8.33
29-31	3	4.17
32-34	0	0.00
>35	4	5.56

Pre and Post-Conference Social Activism Involvement

Participants were asked to select how often they partook in social activism activities prior to attending the conference. Frequency of attendee’s involvement ranged from never to weekly. Overall, there was a wide range of involvement frequency among attendees, but most said that they are involved on a “weekly” basis. Complete results of this question can be found in Table 2.

Table 2  
Social Activism Involvement Prior to Conference by Frequency and Percentage

Prior Involvement	<i>f</i>	%
Weekly	25	35.21
Monthly	17	23.94
Couple times a year	15	21.13
Couple times in past	11	15.49
Never	3	4.23

The next question asked participants how often they desire to partake in social activism activities after this conference. Zero participants responded that they had “no intentions” of taking part in social activism activities in the future. Almost half the participants said that they desire to be involved “weekly in social activism activities after the conference. A full account of responses to this question can be found in table 3.

Table 3.  
Desired Frequency of Post-Conference Involvement by Frequency and Percentage.

Desired Post-Conference Involvement	<i>f</i>	%
Weekly	33	46.48
Monthly	21	29.58
Couple times a year	14	19.72
Couple times in the future	3	4.23
No Intentions	0	0

#### Change in Involvement Desire

Subjects were then asked to indicate how their desire to become involved in social activism has changed as a result of this conference. While many responded that their desire had “greatly increased” ( $n = 24, 33.33\%$ ), the majority of respondents said that their desire had “somewhat increased” ( $n = 38, 52.78\%$ ). While some ( $n = 10, 13.89\%$ ) responded that they experienced “no change” in involvement desire from attending the conference, zero participants indicated a decrease in desire as a result of the conference.

Subjects were asked to indicate whether or not they were attending the conference to fulfill a requirement or gain external benefit. Most were not attending the conference

to fulfill any such requirement ( $n = 50, 69.44\%$ ), but a good percentage were ( $n = 21, 29.17\%$ ). The data from this question were compared with that of the question regarding desire change as a result of the conference. Among this comparison, a greater percentage of those not attending to fulfill a requirement said that their desire to get involved had “greatly increased,” compared to those who were attending to fulfill a requirement and said their desire had “greatly increased”. For a complete presentation of these findings, see table 4.

Table 4  
Change in Desired Involvement by Required Versus Free Choice Conference Attendance  
According to Frequency and Percentage

Desired Involvement	Conference Attendance			
	Required		Free Choice	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Greatly Increased	4	19.05	19	38.00
Somewhat Increased	14	66.67	24	48.00
No Change	3	14.29	7	14.00
Somewhat Decreased	0	0	0	0
Greatly Decreased	0	0	0	0
Total	21	100	50	100

Subjects were also asked if they had attended a “Change the Status Quo” conference in the past. The majority had not attended before ( $n = 42, 58.33\%$ ), but a large number had attended ( $n = 30, 41.67\%$ ). These data were also compared to the data from the question regarding subject’s change in desire to get involved due to the conference. Many who had not attended the conference before indicated that their desire to get

involved “greatly increased” because of the conference. Many who had attended the conference before indicated the same thing. Results according to change in desire were similar between those who had and those who had not attended the conference before. Full results for this comparison are found in Table 5.

Table 5  
Change in Desired Involvement Based on Previous Conference Attendance by Frequency and Percentage

Desired Involvement	Previously Attended Conference			
	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Greatly Increased	9	30.00	15	35.71
Somewhat Increased	17	56.67	21	50.00
No Change	4	13.33	6	14.29
Somewhat Decreased	0	0	0	0
Greatly Decreased	0	0	0	0
Total	30	100	42	100

Impactfulness of Conference Topics

A Likert-Type scale was used to measure the level of impact conference topics had on the participants. On the scale, one represented “not impactful,” and four represented “extremely impactful.” Respondents marked gender equality as the most impactful topic of the conference, while the homelessness topic received the lowest rating. All of the topics however received fairly similar ratings. A complete description of responses can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6  
Impactfulness of Conference Topics According to Mean and Standard Deviation

Conference Topic	Mean	SD
Gender Equality	3.34	.781
Homelessness	2.89	.963
Sexual Orientation Rights	3.27	.667
Diversity Awareness	3.06	.736
Environmental Sustainability	2.95	.705
Education Opportunities for Underpr.	2.93	.917

Note: Each topic had a different number of attendants.

#### Characteristics of Those Desiring a High Level of Involvement

Frequencies and percentages of those who desired weekly involvement, along with their demographic characteristics, were found. In regards to the collegiate status of attendees, there were more college students that indicated a desire for weekly involvement ( $n = 21$ , 63.64%) than non-college students ( $n = 12$ , 36.36%).

The frequencies and percentages for gender of those who desire weekly involvement were also found. The data showed that over half were female ( $n = 21$ , 63.64%), while males were the next significant amount ( $n = 8$ , 24.24%). One participant provided an illegible response, while some did not respond ( $n = 3$ , 9.09%).

The ages of those who desired weekly involvement in social activism activities were also found. The vast majority of these respondents were under the age of 25. A full description of this data can be found in Table 7.

Table 7  
Age of Those Who Desire Weekly Social Activism Involvement by Frequency and Percentage

Age	<i>f</i>	%
<16	0	0.00
17-19	4	12.12
20-22	17	51.52
23-25	6	18.18
26-28	2	6.06
29-31	3	9.09
32-34	0	0.00
>35	0	0.00

Summary

The majority of this study’s respondents were female, in college, and between the ages of 18 to 25. Over half the participants indicated that prior to the conference they were involved in social activism activities on either a weekly or monthly basis. A large percentage then said that after the conference they desire to be involved on a weekly or monthly basis. Over half the attendees said that their desire to be involved in social activism had somewhat increased because of the conference. A lower percentage of those attending to fulfill a requirement said their desire to become involved had greatly increased compared to those who were attending under their own volition. Furthermore, those who had never attended the conference before responded with a higher percentage of a greatly increased desire than those who had attended before. Gender equality was selected the most impactful of all the conference topics, while homelessness had the least

impact on people. Data showed that those who desire the most frequent involvement in social activism activities are female, college students, and between the ages of 18 to 25. The following chapter will provide further analysis of the findings, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research in this study helped to evaluate the effectiveness of the Change the Status Quo social activism conference by measuring the changes in attendee's motivation to get involved. The study also examined which topics were most impactful to attendees. This concluding chapter will include the following: summary of the study, a discussion of the findings including limitations, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for future research.

#### Summary

Social change and social justice is an effort not only pursued by activists and volunteers but professionals as well. These people are motivated to be involved in social change for intrinsic reasons, extrinsic reasons, or both. This desire for social activism involvement sometimes manifests itself in the form of a conference; conferences are where activists and professionals alike gather to inform, motivate, and activate others for the sake of social change. In regards to conferences, there has been considerable research regarding motivations for conference attendance, but very little has been done to measure how well a conference motivates. When it comes to social activism conferences, how and how well it motivates attendees is the most important element. The purpose of this study was to measure the motivations of attendees of the Change the Status Quo conference at Cal Poly to become involved in social activism.

The subjects for this study were all attendees of the Change the Status Quo conference. A one page, double-sided questionnaire containing ten questions was distributed during the final workshop of the conference on February 23, 2013. Conference staff assisted the researcher in distributing and collecting all questionnaires; 72 questionnaires were completed for the study.

The results from this study indicated that most conference attendees were female and college age. Most had a high level of social activism involvement prior to attending the conference, but a greater percentage desiring to be frequently involved after the conference. While some were attending to fulfill a requirement or gain external benefit, those attending under their own volition were more motivated by the conference to become more involved. The percentages of desired involvement between those who had attended the conference before and those who had not were very similar. Gender Equality was rated as the most impactful conference topic.

### Discussion

According to the findings from this study, most attendees were involved in social activism activities on either a weekly or monthly basis before attending the conference. This suggests that attendees of this conference were generally those who already had some intrinsic motivation to participate in social activism activities. The finding that the majority of participants were attending the conference by their own free choice also supports this thought.

While most attendees had a high level of involvement prior to the conference, this study found that attendees' desire to be involved increased by the end of the conference.

This finding implies that the conference was successful in its goal of motivating attendee involvement. While results indicated a higher desire for involvement, it cannot be assumed that participants will actually act on these desires. It is possible that the conference stirred up an emotional response in attendees, leading them to say that they desire a higher level of involvement, but whether or not they will act on this desire is impossible to say based on this study. Future research should attempt to follow up with conference attendees some time after the conference, at a time when they are able to see if participants have acted on their desire to increase their involvement level. Despite the limitations in the research, this study provides very necessary knowledge of how a social activism conference motivates.

Those who attended the conference in order to gain an external benefit or to fulfill a requirement indicated an increase in their desired social activism involvement. However, those attending by their own free choice indicated an even greater increase in desired involvement. This suggests that those pre-inclined to attend a social activism conference are also more likely to respond to the conference message. Further implications could be made that those involved in social activism have a greater capacity for empathy, which explains why those pre-inclined to participate are also more affected by a call to act. This finding could also be explained by what previous research on motivations calls collectivism and/or altruism (Batson et al., 2002); that these attendees so inclined to be involved in social activism have intrinsic values pushing them to listen and to act.

This study showed that those who had never attended the conference before experienced a slightly higher post-conference desired involvement than those who had

attended before. Those who had never experienced this particular conference before would be hearing the message for the first time and may have been much more greatly affected by the conference than those who had previously attended and heard the message. As previously mentioned, the majority of those in attendance were those already frequently involved in social activism activities, implying that they enter the conference with an intrinsic desire to participate.

The Change the Status Quo conference provided a variety of different types of workshops for attendees. Attendees who participated in this study found the gender equality topic as the most impactful. They found the workshops on homelessness to be least impactful, but the differences were minimal. Each of the conference workshops was rated between somewhat impactful and extremely impactful. None of the conference topics were considered by a majority of attendees as not impactful. These findings suggest that all the workshops in the conference were at least somewhat impactful to the attendees. The data from these findings were limited in their generalizability due to the relatively small sample size and contextual nature of the study.

Findings from this study suggest that those who are not college students are slightly more likely to have a high level of involvement in social activism activities. This could be because those not in college have more of a routine that they can commit to, or it could even be because they are more aware of the world around them and more prepared to address needs around them. What is most likely is that the data leading to this suggestion came from the leaders and presenters in attendance at the conference. These individuals would naturally have a higher level of involvement.

In regards to gender identification of those most motivated to have a high level of involvement, there was little difference between males and females. The percentages of those who desire weekly involvement was very similar to the percentages of those in attendance. This led to an inference that gender was not a factor for those in this study to have a high level of involvement. However, there were far more females than males in attendance at this conference, which does suggest that women in general are more likely to be involved in social activism.

This study also examined the ages of attendees and their desire for involvement. The research from this study showed a slight trend that with an increase in age comes an increase in desired level of involvement. This trend could be limited in its reliability because the high levels of desired involvement could be coming from older conference attendees who were leaders and presenters. While it is impossible from this study to know if these people were conference presenters, there still exists the data that suggests that upper college aged individuals have a relatively higher level of desired involvement. This suggests that older college aged individuals are more likely to desire a high level of social activism involvement.

Several implications can be made from the findings in this study. The findings show that the conference was successful in its goal of motivating attendees to become involved in social activism. While attendees were motivated by the conference, the demographics in attendance were limited. Most were college age, female, and already involved in social activism. It is important for conferences like these to bring in a wide range of demographics if they want to succeed in reaching all areas of need. Because social activism is fueled by the efforts of volunteers, it is crucial for social activism

conferences to attract those who have little or no previous experience with social work, in hopes that they will be motivated by the conference to become an involved social activist. This conference also succeeded in providing impactful workshops for the attendees. Providing quality workshops is important to keep attendees engaged and inspired. The contributions from this study provide the social activism field with base knowledge on how a conference motivates, as well as areas of focus to increase effectiveness.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Most attendees were involved in social activism activities on either a monthly or weekly basis before the conference.
2. By the end of the conference, an even greater percentage of attendees desired monthly or weekly involvement in social activism activities.
3. Those in attendance by their own free choice experienced a greater increase in desired involvement than those in attendance to fulfill a requirement or gain external benefit.
4. Those who had not attended the conference before experienced a slightly higher increase in desired involvement than those who had attended the conference before.
5. Attendees found workshops on gender equality to be the most impactful. They found workshops on sexual orientation rights to be second most impactful.
6. Females and upper college aged individuals were most motivated to be involved in social activism.

## Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Attempt to market future conferences to individuals who rarely or have never been involved in social activism activities before.
2. Continue to provide opportunities for attendees to become involved in social activism communities and activities.
3. Consider trying new methods that put more emphasis on motivating individuals who are attending the conference to gain external benefit or fulfill a requirement.
4. Continue to offer excellent workshops on the topics of gender equality and sexual orientation rights.
5. Consider brainstorming ways to increase the impactfulness of homelessness and education opportunities for underprivileged topics.
6. Consider ways to better market the conference to males and trans\* gendered peoples.
7. Future research should attempt to measure attendee frequency of social activism involvement at least a couple weeks after the conference.
8. Future research should attempt to gain a larger number of survey participants to increase the reliability of the findings.
9. Future research should try to find reasons behind each demographic's desire to be involved.

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## APPENDIXES

Appendix A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

# “Change the Status Quo” Conference Evaluation

*Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. Filling out this questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous. Responses will help the Cal Poly Student Life & Leadership, and “Change the Status Quo” conference committee analyze and understand social activism conference motivation.*

1. Have you ever attended a “Change the Status Quo” conference before?

- Yes    No

2. Are you fulfilling a requirement or externally benefitting by attending this conference?

- Yes    No

3. Please indicate how often you participated in social activism activities **before** attending this conference.

- 5 = Weekly  
 4 = Monthly  
 3 = Couple times a year  
 2 = Couple times in past  
 1 = Never

4. Please indicate how often you intend to partake in social activism activities **after** this conference.

- 5 = Weekly  
 4 = Monthly  
 3 = Couple times a year  
 2 = sometime in the future  
 1 = No intentions

5. Please indicate how your desire to get involved in social activism has changed as a result of this conference.

- 5 = Greatly Increased  
 4 = Somewhat Increased  
 3 = no change  
 2 = Somewhat decreased  
 1 = Greatly decreased

6. On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being extremely impactful) please rate the impact each of the following conference programs had on you. (Please circle one for each category)

	<i>Did not Attend</i>	<i>Not Impactful</i>	<i>Somewhat Impactful</i>	<i>Very Impactful</i>	<i>Extremely Impactful</i>
Gender Equality	1	2	3	4	5
Homelessness	1	2	3	4	5
Sexual Orientation Rights	1	2	3	4	5
Human Trafficking	1	2	3	4	5
Racial Discrimination	1	2	3	4	5
Environmental Sustainability	1	2	3	4	5
Education opportunities for underprivileged	1	2	3	4	5

7. How did you hear about this conference?

- Campus Promotion
- Previous Experience
- Social Activism Community
- Friend
- Class

8. Are you a college student?

- Yes    No

9. What is your age? (please write): \_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your gender?

- Male    Female    Prefer not to respond

**Thank You!**

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

## INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN:

### A MEASUREMENT OF THE MOTIVATIONS OF ATTENDEES OF THE “CHANGE THE STATUS QUO” CONFERENCE AT CAL POLY TO BECOME INVOLVED IN SOCIAL ACTIVISM

A senior project on motivations of attendees at the “Change the Status Quo” conference is being conducted by James Statton in the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. The purpose of the study is to measure the change in motivations of conference attendees to become involved in social activism.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing the attached questionnaire. Please answer the following 10 questions to the best of your ability. Your participation will take approximately 10 minutes for this questionnaire, and another 10 for a follow-up questionnaire to be conducted at the end of the conference. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire you prefer not to answer.

There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study. Your responses will be provided anonymously to protect your privacy. Potential benefits associated with the study include contribution to the furthering of knowledge in the social activism conference field.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact *James Statton* at (559) 348-8322. If you have concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, [sdavis@calpoly.edu](mailto:sdavis@calpoly.edu), or Dr. Susan Opava, Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, at (805) 756-1508, [sopava@calpoly.edu](mailto:sopava@calpoly.edu).

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by completing and returning the attached questionnaire. Please retain this consent cover form for your reference, and thank you for your participation in this research.