

Ideology, Equity, and Social Change

by

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the authors explore the development of moral reasoning as it relates to ideologies regarding social change. Guided by Kohlberg's stage theory of morality and Rawls's theory of justice the authors predict social change on the basis of ideological development and examine how moral reasoning is related to ideological awareness. Through the analysis of a specific project, funded to promote sex equity in educational administration, the authors explain their concept of ideological development, provide an example of their methodology, and discuss the implications of their framework.

Ideology, Equity, and Social Change

Beginning in 1976 the federal government, under the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), funded a number of projects to counter sex bias in public education. The WEEA funded projects included those that developed and disseminated non-sexed-biased curriculum and testing materials. These projects were created to train educational personnel, to train underemployed and unemployed women, and to develop programs to expand opportunities for women in educational administration (WEEA, 1976). The WEEA program was the only one in the Office of Education that funded action projects (as opposed to research) to end sexism in education. The program discussed here, promote Women in (PWA),¹ was funded by WEEA from 1976 to 1979.

PWA proposed to develop a model for attaining sex equity in school administration. In the original proposal the PWA staff members outlined several goals they would pursue to increase the number of women in school administration in their state and to develop a model program other groups could use. These goals included: increasing the awareness of the problem of sex inequities, restructuring the content of training programs in educational administration, encouraging the restructuring of administrative jobs, recruiting women into administration, and building the state's capacity for reform. Project members planned a variety of activities to carry out these goals. These activities involved writing a quarterly newsletter, teaching a course on sex inequities in education (at both the host institution and the other state college that trains administrators), meeting with state administrative organizations and

encouraging the practice of job sharing in administrative positions. The project was well received generally by WEEA officials and reviewers. Funding for the project remained high during the contract period and continued a year beyond the original ending date with a total grant of approximately \$450,000. Two of the authors of this paper were hired specifically to conduct an evaluation of PWA's effectiveness. The third author was a regular staff member who worked closely with the evaluation team in an advisory capacity. The evaluation was designed to examine both the outcomes of the project and the processes by which these outcomes were attained. The two evaluators acted as a team by working closely with each other, however, they had separate responsibilities. One evaluator focused on attaining quantitative outcome measures such as actual changes in sex distribution among administration jobs in the target state and other comparable states. The other evaluator served as an ethnographer of the project by observing planning meetings, informal staff gatherings, and formal presentations. These extensive observations, plus interviews with staff members and content analyses of project publications, provided the data on which our conclusions are based. (See Kempner, 1979; Pougiales, 1981; and Stockard, 1980 for more extensive descriptions of the project and summaries of these evaluations.)

The PWA staff was dedicated, hard-working, and sincerely devoted to the project's goals. Yet, most of these goals were unmet by the end of the three years of the project. After examining, discussing, and reexamining our data, we concluded that the ideological beliefs of the PWA staff had an important effect on the success of the project. On the basis of the findings from this case study, we contend that the ideology

held by members of a change-oriented project will influence not only what types of change efforts are developed, but also how these efforts are administered and their ultimate effectiveness. We suggest that this influence has important implications, both for those designing and implementing change efforts and for those seeking to evaluate the success of such social change programs.

We have assumed that the beliefs of the PWA project members influenced their actions. Although beliefs have been overlooked traditionally in evaluation research, they are intrinsic in human action and are essential in the interpretation of behavior (Blumer, 1969). A set of beliefs used to justify cultural maintenance or cultural change is termed an "ideology" and can be thought of as the set of beliefs used to guide collective political behavior (Mannheim, 1936). In the present context we are most concerned with beliefs regarding justice, since we believe these are especially important in influencing the success of social change projects.²

Below we explore the development of moral reasoning as it relates to ideologies regarding social change and we examine how moral reasoning is related to ideological awareness. We suggest that social change projects can be characterized by their level of ideological awareness and then delineate three ideal levels of "ideological development." We suggest that a change project's characteristic level of ideological development is related to the types of strategies it employs and thus its ultimate effectiveness. Finally, we discuss how change projects may develop greater ideological effectiveness.

The Development of Moral Reasoning

Lawrence Kohlberg's extensive theoretical work in the area of moral development has guided us in our conceptualization of moral judgment. Drawing on the work of Piaget (1953), Dewey (1938), G.H. Mead (1934), Rawls (1971) and others, Kohlberg has developed a theory which accounts for the development of individuals' moral reasoning (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969, 1975). The concept of morality is central to his developmental schema: "morality is a natural product of a universal human tendency toward empathy or role taking, toward putting oneself in the shoes of other conscious beings. It is also a product of a universal human concern for justice" (Kohlberg, 1975: 675). Kohlberg describes the development of moral reasoning as a logical progression in reasoning that develops from two sources: role-taking opportunities and moral atmosphere.

Although most of Kohlberg's work deals with the development of individuals' moral reasoning, we have applied his ideas to the characteristics of moral reasoning within social groups. Individuals within a group certainly may vary widely in their beliefs and actions, but if a social group is to continue to exist, it will eventually develop in-group rules of behavior that are generally accepted and agreed upon. Although individual group members may vary in their degrees of adherence to these norms, and are often even unaware of the existence of these norms, the within group variation in behavior is often small in comparison to that between groups.

Interestingly enough, the two key sources of moral development that Kohlberg identifies -- role-taking opportunities and moral atmosphere --

are both group-related variables. Although they are certainly influenced by the individual characteristics of a group's members, they are also influenced by the social, structural constraints of a group. In fact, these two factors, role-taking and moral atmosphere, are merged by Kohlberg to form a general factor of social participation that includes both the extent and the nature of social learning and interaction.

Role-Taking

The ability of project members to adopt different perspectives or "roles" appears related directly to their capacity to expand their understanding of a social situation beyond their own identities. In the case of social change agents, we suspect that the degree to which they interact with and incorporate the views of others is related directly to their ability to direct their change efforts in a judicious manner.³ There was indication that PWA project members had limited opportunities for role-taking and, hence, were often unable to extend their reform efforts to people beyond their immediate contact. None of the staff members had been school administrators and none had been employed recently in the public schools. Only a few staff members had contact with aspiring or actual women administrators, and these administrators and aspirants were rarely asked to provide advice on project activities. In addition, most of the PWA staff had Ph.D.'s in education-related areas or were working to attain those degrees. Some activities of PWA indicated, therefore, that project members often valued academe and the doctoral program in administration over the credential training program for administrators. Project members often focused on people in situations like their own and then directed

many of the project's resources toward those people. Unfortunately, women with doctoral degrees rarely enter school administration, choosing instead to pursue research careers outside the public school system (Edson, 1979). Thus the focus on women in doctoral, rather than credential, programs did little toward helping the project accomplish its ultimate goal of altering the representation of women in school administration.

The one exception to the above generalizations about role-taking in PWA involves the most successful project activity: A state-wide organization of women administrators and aspirants. The group was not part of PWA's original set of planned activities, but evolved from the interest and actions of various women employed in school districts around the state. Even though only a small proportion of the project's budget and time was devoted to helping found this organization, it is the most visible legacy of PWA and now appears to be a growing and viable group. We believe that this activity was successful because it was directed specifically toward the needs of the target population. The development of this organization required that the change agents communicate with women aspirants and administrators so that they could understand their needs and then act to fill them.

Moral Atmosphere

A social change project's moral atmosphere involves the roles and institutional expectations in which the project members function. The atmosphere provides the context for acceptable practices and establishes the parameters for values and beliefs. PWA was the only project sponsored by the Office of Education housed within the state university's

Educational Research Center, which was funded by the National Institute of Education (NIE). The research center, as do most NIE centers, focused on academic research much more than on applied social change. The research center was also linked with the university's teaching unit that was responsible for training administrators. This element of PWA's moral atmosphere probably influenced its emphasis on academic work. For instance, a large proportion of staff members' time was devoted to teaching a class on sexism and education. Even more time was devoted to writing articles and monographs and publishing a book on the subject of sex equity in education. These activities meshed more easily with the academic emphasis of the center than activist, change-oriented activities such as the organization of women administrators and aspirants.

PWA's host research center had been the target of a sex discrimination suit only a few months before the beginning of PWA. As a result of the suit, the center's staff was not especially sympathetic to feminist causes. This aspect of PWA's moral atmosphere probably contributed to the project members' reluctance to promote actively permanent changes in curriculum. Establishment of a course on sexism and education as part of the regular university curriculum and inclusion of the course content in an extension training program for administrators had been important, original goals for the project. The course on sexism and education was taught by PWA staff for a number of terms, but was not adopted as part of the permanent curriculum. Project staff members never participated in sessions of the extension program. Our observations led us to conclude that these failures to change the curriculum stemmed primarily from the reluctance of the project staff to challenge openly the immedi-

ate, non-feminist moral atmosphere. The project members valued harmony and a minimization of conflict with the host center, and the moral atmosphere of the host center did not condone serious value changes.

Ideological Awareness

Ideological awareness can be seen as the outcome of the moral atmosphere of a project and the role-taking opportunities of its members. Ideology, when defined as the beliefs that guide collective behavior, results from the personal perspectives of the individuals involved and the social setting in which they operate. Ideological awareness involves the conscious examination of individuals' and groups' belief systems. This is the process of social criticism; what Freire (1968) calls "conscientiazcao" and what Bowers (1974) refers to as "cultural literacy." The ability to perceive external events with an ideological awareness often depends on the degree to which individual's or a project's ideology has been reflected upon due to contrast or conflict. The process of creating conflict or contrast raises beliefs to a conscious level rather than simply being taken for granted. If the moral atmosphere of a group supports examination of a variety of viewpoints and critical reflection, deliberate action can be based on that reflection.

One aspect of PWA's activities illustrates this process. The project members were interested in restructuring administrative jobs, believing that the present organization of administrative work was related possibly to the lack of women participants. In the first year staff member's interests centered on job-sharing. From our interviews and observations we concluded that members of the project had views that varied widely on the usefulness and political efficacy of this strategy.

These views centered generally on whether or not job sharing would help gain equality for women.⁴ Interestingly enough, these varied views were almost never discussed openly in staff meetings and when they were mentioned, they were only summarized. Although the project proposals for each year mentioned activities involving job restructuring, work in this area was not completed as proposed. We believe that the lack of resolution in this area stems, at least partly, from the group's failure to promote ideological awareness, to explore reasons for various types of strategies and to choose the most effective strategy.

Ideology and Social Change

From the discussion above it is clear that we believe ideology influences behavior. This idea, of course, is not unique. Geertz (1973) portrayed ideology as a symbolic structure which guides society. Turner (1970) observed that "the values held by [a] movement constituency affect selection of strategy both directly and indirectly." Tichy (1974) concluded from a study of change agents that the consequence of values, cognitions, and actions is highest for those who attempt the most dramatic social change.

We accept Geertz, Turner, and Tichy's work and suggest that a change project's potential for effectiveness is related directly to its moral atmosphere, normative patterns of role-taking, and its ideological awareness. We envision a continuum that extends from an unquestioning acceptance of cultural values to a critical awareness of those values. We assume further that the degree of cultural awareness is related directly to change strategies a project employs. The influence of role-taking and moral atmosphere is critical in stimulating this ideological

or cultural awareness. A concern with social justice, and specifically how change agents would provide equal access to resources, is also involved in ideological awareness. As groups become more culturally critical and begin to see value deficiency in the social order, a concern for social justice emerges. We place this growing conceptualization of social justice by groups on a continuum of ideological development and discuss below three typical levels or stages on this continuum. The levels help clarify the relationship between ideology and justice and show the range of ideological development we propose.

Groups at the first level of ideological development are characterized by little awareness or consideration of social justice and values. Change is justified on an efficient or mechanistic basis and involves simply a replacement of one social form for a comparable one. This is a level of physical reciprocity which involves an exchange of methods with similar ideologies or techniques. Technological innovations in education, such as changes in curriculum materials, would be at this level when such innovations merely alter the instructional message without also minimizing inequalities in student achievement.⁵

Groups at the second level are characterized by a reliance, albeit often unrecognized, on the status quo as justification for change. Although these groups have a degree of cultural awareness, their impetus for change comes from the dominant culture. The change effort is a consensual, ethical redress and reflects the dominant cultural values. Justice, likewise, is defined by the values and interests of the dominant culture. At this second level of development, change is allowable

only within the strictures of the status quo. Change strategies at this level may include efforts to modify internal societal process; but when the system's structure is the origin of inequities, such mid-level attempts can accomplish only superficial change.

Funded interventions in this country often occur at this second level. A variety of strategies to equalize social injustices are developed from this perspective, but these efforts do not include changes to alter the ultimate structure of the social system. For instance, anti-poverty programs often involve job training, but rarely involve attempts to equalize incomes among individuals. The strategy of job training coincides well with the free enterprise system by equipping the indigent to compete within the existing system. This strategy does little to insure that poverty will disappear from the society as a whole, because nothing has been done to erase the inequities of the labor structure. The strategy of equalizing incomes challenges the free enterprise system, and also attacks more directly poverty at a societal-wide level.

Groups at the third level are characterized by an awareness beyond a simple acceptance of the dominant values in society. Change is justified by principles of social justice which would mitigate the sources of inequality in a social institution and its customs and attitudes. Rather than treating only one aspect of a problem, the various aspects of the problem would be addressed. By not accepting passively the status quo, change agents at this level are free to search for new ideologies and methods to create a more just society. Questioning the priority of values and the distinctions between wants and needs are the concerns of change agents at this highest level of development.

We would suggest that the PWA project operated usually at the second level of development. Our criterion for categorizing this project's and other project's level of ideology is the behavior or strategies that the project members pursue and the reasoning used to justify these strategies. Obviously, not all people in a project will agree on the strategies they believe should be adopted, and not all activities of a project will necessarily reflect the same level of ideological development. This was certainly true of the PWA project. In fact, a number of the conflicts over strategies involved decisions between the second and third level. For example, during one PWA meeting a project member explained that the consideration of social justice was beyond the requirements of the project's funding contract.

We would suggest that the most effective, long lasting, and equitable changes will result from projects with ideological development at level three. A moral atmosphere that supports an open examination of possible alternative strategies and a critical examination of one's beliefs should be most conducive to effective and equitable change.

We suspect that most projects funded by large-scale federal programs, such as WEEA, operate at the second level of ideological development. For example, other projects funded by WEEA developed non-sexist curriculum and testing materials and training programs for women in career, vocational, and physical education. These projects assumed implicitly that sex stratification, the unequal distribution of resources to females and males, could be lessened if boys and girls are given non-sexist curriculum materials and if women are trained to enter new jobs. Members of these projects operated under the assumption that changing

the nature of education and training can alter sex stratification in other institutions.⁶ Although the change efforts sponsored by WEEA may lessen sex stratification in schools, projects which operate with a level three ideology would not focus only on education. With a broader cultural awareness, project members might see sex stratification as intrinsic to all social institutions. Even if non-sex-typed occupations are depicted in books and testing materials, the actual occupations may well remain sex typed; even if women are trained for jobs, there is no guarantee that employers will hire them.

It is important to emphasize that the PWA project and other projects funded by WEEA have had some success in meeting their intended and short-term goals. Most of the projects were staffed with well-meaning people, concerned with creating greater equality for men and women. PWA had considerable impact on some individuals and probably contributed to a greater awareness of the inequities in school administration within the state. Yet, even though the PWA project, and others funded under this program, met a number of their immediate goals, we should not assume that they will produce sex equity. Because many of these projects have operated with ideologies that promote and do not question the status quo, there will probably be few, if any, long-lasting changes in the nature of sex stratification, the ultimate goal of these social change efforts. These programs were an effective mechanism to maintain the status quo by forcing change agents to compete over a limited amount of money for change efforts focused within a relatively limited area. A coordinated effort that linked the work of WEEA projects to other sex equity programs sponsored by the federal government was not conducted.

Promoting Greater Ideological Development

The theoretical development above has been based on an analysis of only one project, and its confirmation or revision will depend on the examination of many other cases. Nevertheless, we can suggest possible strategies that may be employed to enhance the ideological development of a change project. These can involve the nature of the project staff, the project's organizational patterns and norms, and the sponsoring agency.

The ideology and moral development of individual project members undoubtedly influence a project's level of ideological development. For instance, even though they supported the project's goals, only a few members of PWA's staff described themselves as feminists when the project began. Conceivably, if more of the staff had expounded personally an ideology that promoted broader cultural changes they would have been more willing to pursue appropriate strategies of change.

Despite the initial views of individual staff members, we assert that projects may develop norms that promote greater ideological awareness and development. By trying consciously to understand the ideological basis for various change strategies and to take the role of a variety of others, groups may enhance the possibility of greater cultural awareness and the development of more effective changes. Although academicians are often trained to explore the various facets of issues and are often quite skilled in discussing ramifications of possible actions, this is usually an intellectual, rather than a practical, exercise. We suspect that one reason the PWA project often had less success than its staff members hoped was that its moral environment in

academe did not promote effective action. Thus, it is important that when groups seek to develop greater cultural awareness, they do not confine this awareness only to the intellectual sphere; instead, they should try to develop support systems for deliberate and conscious action.

Finally, we suggest that our analysis may have implications for groups that sponsor social change efforts, both in their decisions about what kinds of change efforts to fund and in the kinds of support services they provide. Sponsoring agencies should solicit and encourage the development of projects that are based on a level three ideology when social change is truly the goal. Support from outside a project, such as that commonly provided by project monitors, can also help enhance the ideological development of a project and thus produce greater change.

Conclusion

In this paper we have suggested that social change projects may be differentiated on the basis of their underlying ideological assumptions. We have suggested that only those projects whose members look beyond the status quo will be effective in promoting significant social change and a more just society. Although any single project's effectiveness is limited, a large-scale, funded change effort, such as WEEA, does have the potential to accomplish significant social change when strategies at level three are promoted. The failure of the funding agency to encourage strategies at level three in its projects does not, however, abrogate a project's need to consider issues of social justice.

Certainly, projects that do not operate at the highest level of ideological development are still capable of some effect. As we have noted, the PWA project assisted in raising the issue of educational equity for many women and men. Such efforts may be necessary to provide an initial impetus for social change, but unless other strategies are developed which deal with social justice on a wider scale, only limited change can be accomplished. To cause significant social change, funding agencies must encourage their projects to develop strategies of change based on level three ideology and must recruit projects which include level three strategies in their goals. Until such efforts are planned and implemented, significant change cannot be accomplished.

In suggesting that only projects at the highest level of ideological development will be the most successful, we do not advocate one method of change over another. Confrontation, awareness building, and economic incentives, for example, may be used in promoting change within any of the three levels we have delineated. It is the purpose behind change efforts that is important. If the underlying ideology involves a broad concern with social justice and if it includes a viewpoint that transcends the immediate situation, we would predict that more effective change would be possible. We believe that the operation of social change activities at the highest level of ideological development provides the only manner in which sexism and racism can ever be overcome.

Footnotes

1. This project name is a pseudonym.
2. A number of authors (e.g., House, 1976, 1980; Strike, 1979) have discussed the relationship of justice and evaluation methods. While they have been concerned primarily with the justice-related elements of methodology of the evaluation itself, we are concerned with the justice related ideologies of the staffs of social change projects and how these effect the change strategies they employ.
3. It should be noted that Kohlberg's use of the concept of role-taking is narrower than Mead's (1934) original use of the term. In seeing role-taking as part of all social interaction Mead implies that all people, even those with malevolent designs, take the role of the other.
4. Job-sharing involves the sharing of one job by two people. Proponents of job-sharing for administrative positions see it as a way to reduce job-related stress and also allow women to work outside the home, while continuing to devote energy to their family. Opponents of job-sharing caution that the job-sharer may be exploited, especially in administrative and professional jobs where they are paid for fewer hours than they work. Opponents also suggest that job-sharing may be a tactic to inflate affirmative action statistics artificially without altering women's actual power or position and may promote stereotypical views of women's responsibilities in the home.
5. Values clarification may be another example of this kind of educational change. While the proponents of this technique claim it is a significant innovation, critics view it as merely a new process which perpetuates present values.
6. We do not deny that the generally equal educational attainment of males and females in the United States has been an important impetus for the current feminist movement. We do assert, however, that it is unrealistic to expect that changes in education alone will prompt changes in other social institutions. Education can mitigate inequities but educational changes must occur in concert with other, planned social change to be effective.

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