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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusions' Role in the Moral Development of a College Student

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusions' Role in the Moral Development of a College Student

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Master's Project

Submitted to the College of Education at Grand Valley State University

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**GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY**

The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Kyley Knudson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. in Higher Education, College Student Affairs Leadership.

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Abstract

This paper explores the moral development of the college student and how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs affect those students' development. A university has an obligation to provide an education to the students and help build the character development of the individual as well. Part of that education journey is focused on the moral development of the students. This project takes Kohlberg's moral development theory and explores how a university should address that development. Kohlberg clearly states that college students should be focused on building up their social welfare awareness. Using DEI Principles and programs can bring an abundance of positive impacts to the college environment and, more importantly, help push a student's moral development journey forward.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Now more than ever, colleges and universities play a crucial role in students' personal and educational development. As expected, the main focus of attending a college or university has been and will always be to gain an education. However, colleges also stimulate various types of personal development, including students' character and moral development. This stimulation in a student's moral development is encouraged and government-backed as it should become a focal point in all higher education learning environments. According to the 1998 amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965, "Congress voted to support and encourage character-building initiatives in schools across America and urge colleges and universities to affirm the development of character as one of the primary goals of higher education" (King & Mayhew, 2004, p. 375). Universities clearly understand the importance of moral development and why they should be creating an environment of growth. This project is focusing on achieving this holistic approach. This project discusses ways a college can implement moral development into the environment, culture, and education using DEI initiatives as a tool for success. Every student is unique and has individual needs alongside their educational journey. While there is not a cookie-cutter solution to this problem, this project explores the best practices for this issue.

Importance and Rationale of Project

Before addressing the clear benefits that diversity initiatives can add to a student's development, it is also essential to recognize why a college or university might invest in a student's overall development. Most colleges have adopted the goal of trying to help their students outside of just education. Since the start of the higher education field, the moral

development of the student has been a priority (King & Mayhew, 2004; Mayhew et al., 2012).

Many colleges have even started to include moral development in their mission statements, values, or goals. "College mission statements today continue to refer to purposes that include a moral dimension, such as preparation for citizenship, civic engagement, character development, moral leadership, service to society, and responsible participation in a diverse democracy" (King & Mayhew, 2004, p. 375). The majority of organizations that focus on college education are also steering towards the purposes of students' overall character development. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, as well as the Association of American Colleges and Universities, are two examples of organizations that have shown their support in a more central role for moral education at colleges and universities (King & Mayhew, 2004), (Mayhew et al., 2012). Although moral development plays a large part in students' growth, a college should focus on character development. A college is given the task of helping students grow because a college campus embodies a learning environment (Cooke et al., 2006). Students will be developing their entire life emotionally. Now that they have transitioned into a new location while gaining a unique feeling of independence, it has become a malleable time for students (King & Mayhew, 2004). There have also been new policies added to assist colleges with this goal. According to the 1998 amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965, "Congress voted to support and encourage character-building initiatives in schools across America and urge colleges and universities to affirm the development of character as one of the primary goals of higher education" (King & Mayhew, 2004, p. 375). Considering the facts at hand, one of the most influential priorities for a college or university should be to help the student's moral development. While many colleges succeed in doing this, these colleges must decide to focus their time and resources when nurturing the growth of their students.

Background of the Project

Since the beginning of higher education, moral development was always a concern of college administrators (King & Mayhew, 2004). Some of the first universities ever created took responsibility for developing the character of the young men in their care. "Though colonial educators attached religious beliefs to morality, contemporary educators and researchers understand that morality and religion are separate constructs" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 336). They understood that college is a time when many students are learning, growing, and developing critical aspects of themselves and finally starting to ask hard questions about what they believe is right. This experience could be a student's first time pondering some of life's more challenging questions. As it is said, "everyone must begin somewhere, making assumptions and emphasizing some things over other things" (Rest et al, 2000, p. 381). Due to the nature of college, this space is likely somewhere for many students.

Institutions of Higher Education are historically aware of the importance of a student's development during the years spent at an institution. Dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, when Jean Piaget and John Rawls began the conversation about moral development, theorists have continued to refine how moral development occurs and what it looks like for adolescent students as they move through critical years of development. Literature found that adding moral development processing into the curriculum is beneficial. Institutions foster the moral development of students because they facilitate an educational environment that encourages students to broaden their ethical perspective and capacities by thinking critically and mindfully about morality and righteousness (King & Mayhew, 2004). Mainly, institutions introduce students to moral reasoning growth by challenging them "to re-examine existing ideas of justice in light of the new information presented by a social and often unfamiliar encounter" (Mayhew,

2012, p. 368). Institutions, then, become spaces that serve "as the catalyst for evolving notions of justice and fairness" (Mayhew, 2012, p. 368). Moreover, moral development "depends upon stimulation defined in cognitive-structural terms, but this stimulation must also be social, which comes from moral decision-making, moral dialogue, and moral interaction" (Mayhew, 2012, p. 368). Therefore, how institutions shape the moral reasoning growth of students depends upon the practices, programs, and policies that an institution has in place and its educational contexts (e.g., institutional type) (Mayhew, 2012). Particularly, institutions must critically examine their "campus climate, curricular, co-curricular and informal interactions between students" because those are strategies that may foster the development of students' moral reasoning (Parker et al., 2016, p. 397). Studies have also suggested that organizational behavior (i.e., collegial, political, symbolic, systemic, and bureaucratic), peer socialization, political orientation, pre-college academic preparation, cognitive motivation, and racial and gender identity must be explored to effectively understand the moral reasoning development of first-year students (Mayhew, 2012). Ultimately, "educational ability and year in college are positively associated with students' moral development" (Parker et al., 2016, p. 398).

Purpose & Objective

The overall purpose of this project is to find successful strategies that a university can use to help build the moral development of the student. As stated in this chapter, the moral development of the student is an essential task a university must tackle, but there is not a specific universal plan that a college can use to help build up that moral development. Studies have shown that the college experience is a crucial time in someone's life because it brings a new sense of self-authorship, so that is why it is such a critical time for these colleges to get involved.

Without a university's involvement, it will indirectly hurt the student's development. It is a moral obligation that a college focuses on helping students in their personal development journey. This project establishes a strategic game plan that a university should follow to help build that moral and character development. Each university has different variables that come into play when looking at a student's moral development, but the purpose of this analysis is to build a strong foundation for each university to follow. The objective is that these universities can use this project as a baseline and adapt their own moral development game plan to serve their students best. A university should have a better grasp of its own campus culture and environment. Therefore, implementing its values with this project's baseline suggestions can create a successful strategic plan.

Definition of Terms

Key Terms:

- Moral Development: Moral development in college students describes the processes through which individuals develop more complex principles and ways of reasoning about what is right, just, and caring (Patton et al., 2016, p. 336).
- Diversity training: Bezrukova et al. (2012) define diversity training in their study, *Reviewing Diversity Training: Where We Have Been and Where We Should Go*, as "a distinct set of programs aimed at facilitating positive intergroup interactions, reducing prejudice and discrimination, and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of people to interact with diverse other" (p. 208).

- Inclusion: I believe that the great diversity advocate Verna Myers best describes what inclusion means. Myers states, "Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance" (Shavers, 2020, p.33).

- Retention Rate: Retention rate is used in various ways, but when addressed in this paper, the retention rate refers to the percentage of students who choose to continue their college education each year until completion (Marsh, 2014).

Summary and Scope of Project:

The main objective of this project is to show how a university or university administrators can successfully implement an initiative focused on diversity and inclusive culture to help build the moral development of the college student. If a university implements the suggestions provided in chapter three, then it will see the overall culture shift into an environment that creates opportunities for students' moral development to flourish. Creating an inclusive and welcoming culture at a university, will allow the students to participate in a successful learning environment. A safe, embracing college culture is the solution to a college student's moral success.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As stated in chapter one, moral development plays a critical role in the overall character development of a college student. The federal government has shown its support, and many organizations have pushed for more character development at a university. The vast majority of college's core values and mission statements also include some moral development aspects (King & Mayhew, 2004). While I have made it very clear that it is needed at each university, this

chapter focuses on creating a better understanding of moral development and its impacts on the student. This chapter will use the most widely accepted moral development model, *Kohlberg's Model,* as a baseline of how each university should approach the student's development. Kohlberg clearly explains where college students lack moral development, and this chapter shows what can be done to correct that shortcoming. I will also address where Kohlberg's theory has been criticized and questioned. While Kohlberg's theory is the standardized theory of moral development, some may see it as outdated and not inclusive of all different types of identities. Addressing both of these points is an essential aspect before addressing a solution.

Theory/Rationale

Kohlberg's Model:

It is fair to say that universities play an essential role in a multitude of student development areas, and it can be argued that one of the most crucial areas of development is moral development (King & Mayhew, 2004). People develop moral values throughout their entire life. During childhood, most individuals start to understand the rights from wrongs and the concepts of good and evil. However, they tend to learn moral development later in life past the basics. It is essential to acknowledge what moral development means when looking at what guidance colleges and universities should be offering. As mentioned previously, there is a necessary involvement with moral development for college students which is why professionals in the higher education field should understand moral development and its theories. The most well-known work involving moral development is Kohlberg's work. In Kohlberg's stages of moral development model, Kohlberg breaks up moral development into three levels and six stages. The third level, or fifth and sixth stages, are broken up into social-contract orientation and Universal-Ethical-Principle orientation (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Stage five focuses on the

understanding that there are different worldviews, values, and rights. All people should mutually respect these views and rights. The sixth stage focuses on people's understanding of what is morally abstract and what is concrete. In this stage, the moral principles focus more on equality, dignity, or respect for all. These final steps are focused on the social welfare of other individuals and build on the empathetic reasoning of a human being. Notably, many people will never make it to this final stage of Kohlberg's moral development theory (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Following this model provided by Kohlberg and Hersh, college students should have already learned the first stages of their moral development before entering college. It should be a college's goal to focus on the final stages of a student's moral development. A university should be evolving a student's moral development and pushing it forward, and it should never stop post-K-12. A university should be more intentional when focusing on stages 5 and 6 of Kohlberg's theory. That is at least what Kohlberg and Hersh would argue, but many have criticized their theory and overall way of thinking. It must be acknowledged and reiterated that students do not have the same experiences in higher education. Ergo, their moral developmental processes may differ based on their initial socialization processes, their racial or gender identity, and how they perceive campus culture and climate at their institution. Institutions become socially constructed environments that are ascribed meaning based on the experiences of individual students. For instance, when "compared to White students, students self-identifying as African American/Black were less likely to show moral reasoning gains at the end of their first year in college" (Mayhew, 2012, p. 380). The lived experiences of students of color at predominantly white institutions are often disregarded and critically unexamined as they may endure unforeseen challenges, exclusionary practices, and policies that may hinder their chances of effectively and authentically cultivating a sense of community and belonging at their institution.

Critique of Kohlberg's Model:

An example of a moral development expert taking Kohlberg's theory and modifying it would be Rest's Neo-Kohlbergian approach (Rest & Narvaez, 2000). Rest used Kohlberg's theory to create a defining issues test (DIT) that can objectively measure someone's moral development. This test has become the standardized and most commonly used method of testing someone's moral development. While Rests has his theory's core coming from Kohlberg, Rest also addresses two rules of a person's thinking; How rules are taught to an individual and shared and how interests balance between the two (Rest & Narvaez, 2000). This theory differs from Kohlberg's because Rest viewed moral development more broadly than Kohlberg. Rest looked at how institutions and rules systems in society may consider when someone makes a decision. Rest also denied Kohlberg's stage and step model and proposed a continuous process. Rest believes it is more appropriate to assume that the individual's reasoning and moral development constantly adapt rather than jump from stage to stage. They also think that a person can be in multiple stages simultaneously rather than stuck in one stage (Rest & Narvaez, 2000). This theory was able to adapt Kohlberg's theory into a more widespread approach.

Carol Gilligan also offered a theory that heavily criticized Kohlberg's theory. Kohlberg initially used male participants in their study and concluded that women could not reach the same development levels as males. In his future studies, Kohlberg would then start to include women in his developmental research but still found them underdeveloped compared to their male counterparts. Gilligan then spent 30 years studying females and their relationships with moral development. The main difference that Gilligan found in that research is that the meaning of the world is quite different. Kohlberg believed that someone's morality focuses on autonomy

and universal justice. At the same time, Gilligan observed that some individuals, often women, actually make moral decisions based on relationships with others and self-care (Gilligan, 1995). Most of Gilligan's work is with women, but they were able to trace a conflict between self and others. Gilligan believes that a woman's moral development proceeds through three levels and two transitional periods (Gilligan, 1995). These stages and transitions offer a better understanding between yourself and others and selfishness and responsibility. Kohlberg believed that women could not reach the same development as men, but he was incorrect. Gilligan offered a different standpoint that identity played a role in someone's moral and ethical development. Gilligan's method was focused more on the differences between gender, but that was the catalyst to more research into different identities and how that relates to moral development. In some instances, it showed no difference in gender-related differences, but there were differences between different cultures. For example, Vikan et al. found that there were no gender-related differences between students in Norway and Brazil, but they did find that students from Norway measured higher on ethics and care compared to Brazilian students (2007). It is fair to assume that culture can influence reasoning and ethics (Vikan, 2007). It does not stop there. Culture and gender will not only impact an individual's moral development, but their entire identity can play a role. Different identities, especially minoritized identities, will have a different development process than other groups. That is something that should not only be addressed but strategized.

These theories offer a different critique or direction that moral development should follow. Many of these theories suggest that participating in post-secondary education enhances the student's moral development. Liddell and Cooper strongly encourage moral and ethical education to become more prominent in higher education. They believe that a university should purposely design learning opportunities that focus on students' moral development. These

teachings provide students with skills within and without the classroom. If a university were to add a more moral development curriculum, students would become more ethical and enhance their professional decision-making (Liddell & Cooper, 2012).

Research Evaluation

A university should be more intentional when focusing on stages 5 and 6 of Kohlberg's theory. If they focus on those stages, they will push the students' moral development forward. They are providing the opportunity for growth that many people will never see. From Kohlberg's standpoint, the colleges should focus on getting a better understanding of equality, dignity, and respect for all (Patton et al., 2016). Kohlberg indirectly argues that more DEI programs and initiatives should be implemented in a university setting, which can directly help students reach that third and final step that most never achieve. The main critique of Kohlberg's theory is that it was based solely on white cis males, and the moral development theory did not consider different types of identities. While combating the theory's critiques, DEI programs and initiatives look to build these same fundamentals of Kohlberg's third stages. Adding these initiatives will help a diverse amount of students to grow, not just a single type of identity.

What are DEI Initiatives:

Before diving in on the advantages of diversity initiatives, exploring what DEI programs can allow for explicit acknowledgment of their benefits. Bezrukova et al. define diversity training as "a distinct set of programs aimed at facilitating positive intergroup interactions, reducing prejudice and discrimination, and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of people to interact with diverse other" (2012, p. 208). Diversity training differs from other types

of training because it challenges the way one views the world and deals with issues that may seem emotional or subjective (Bezrukova et al., 2012, p. 208). This has an exact correlation to Kohlberg's 5th and 6th stages. To entirely understand diversity training, a person must understand what is happening at this training, recognize its purpose, and know to continue learning and be aware. Bezrukova et al. find that "the goals of most diversity training programs include compliance, harmony, inclusion, justice, and transformation" (Bezrukova et al., 2012, p. 208). In all of these studies, Bezrukova et al. find that if diversity training goals have been achieved, then the overall welfare of the individuals in that specific community will rise (Bezrukova et al., 2012). They came across this by breaking down the three outcomes that come from diversity training, individuals become more satisfied due to positive work or social climates, diverse groups can be more effective and generate more new ideas for innovation, and finally, organizations can also obtain a competitive advantage due to less turnover (Bezrukova et al., 2012). While these outcomes relate to college and work atmospheres, those atmospheres are closely related because both are striving for the same goals. The desired outcome for both is for different groups of people to learn how to work together effectively and successfully. Once a cohesive group of individuals is working together, the satisfaction of the organization and the individual will increase (Bezrukova et al., 2012). That is precisely what a diversity program is for, to create a better understanding between individuals.

In Anzaldúa et al.'s article, *We Hold These Truths: Defining Access, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Restorative Practice,* the authors provide a different idea of what diversity training is. They believe it should be more focused on restoring justice and providing reconciliation. The Center for Justice and Reconciliation breaks it down into three steps. "Repair: justice requires repairing harm. Encounter: the best way to determine how to repair harm is to

have the parties decide together. And Transformation: this elicits fundamental changes in people, relationships, and communities" (Anzaldúa et al., 2022, p. 54). While looking for similar goals, this definition takes a different approach to the Bezrukova et al. method.

Just like Anzaldúa et al. and Bezrukova et al. suggested, there is little consensus regarding diversity training. Studies have shown that there is little to no consensus on the definition of diversity training, the overarching goals, and the particular best practices of diversity training (Devine & Ash, 2022). The excitement and implementation have outpaced the available evidence currently available. Devine understands this, they make three final recommendations of what they believe the goals and approach of diversity training are. "The goal is to increase belonging, retention, and achievement of students from historically marginalized groups and promote an inclusive school climate. The training most often consists of semester-long courses (e.g., the psychology of prejudice, women studies, human sexuality, etc.). Students are educated on members' complex histories and perspectives from historically marginalized groups (Devine & Ash, 2022, p. 420). Similar to Bezrukova et al., after compiling years of research, Devine also found that the main goal focused on a sense of belonging for all groups (2022). Diversity training doesn't have to be specific training and certification, but rather it is looking at the goal of creating an inclusive environment. When a university implements diversity training, the only goal isn't to help the personal growth of a student but also to help build a more inclusive, belonging environment.

Impacts of DEI involvement:

Bezrukova et al. argued that diversity initiatives positively impact inclusiveness, but DEI training can also benefit the university. Talbert's(2012) study actually made a connection between DEI initiatives and the retention rate of the student (Talbert, 2012). Adding more DEI to

university academics can positively impact graduation and retention rates (Talbert, 2012). Retention rate is one of, if not the number one priority of a college. While this is one of the main focuses of every university, America's graduation and retention rate are far too low. Over the last decade, there has been a decline in graduation rates (Talbert, 2012). As of 2019, only 36 percent of 25-year-olds and over have a bachelor's degree (nces.ed.gov, 2021). The number of students with bachelor's degrees is low, and it is even lower with students of color. African American students have a bachelor's degree rate of 26.3, Hispanics at 18.8, and American Indians at 16.8 percent (nces.ed.gov, 2021). These statistics make it clear that we are very far from our ideal situation. It is very concerning that students of color are lagging in the graduation rate. The answer to helping improve the retention rate of these students might be DEI initiatives. Studies show that when college students have a sense of belonging and feel included in their community, the retention rates increase (Talbert, 2012). Studies also show that to improve this sense of belonging, it must become an initiative to add more DEI programs to college students' lives (Talbert, 2012). Adding more DEI programs and initiatives into a school's community will create a more inclusive environment, increasing the retention rate. One way to help build a robust environment is by creating those inclusive standards from the very start. Adding DEI initiatives into a student's orientation can help develop that inclusive environment. "New student orientation programs that promote diversity are the gateway to student inclusiveness in academia" (Talbert, 2012, p. 24). It will create a better sense of inclusion, but it will also hone in on the students' sense of belonging.

Parker et al. also explored the impact of DEI implementations at a college in their article, *The Impact of Diversity Courses on College Students' Moral Development* (2016). This study was performed to estimate the impact of diversity-focused courses on students' growth

throughout their four years in college. This study was conducted on 17 different institutions that included a wide variety of university types, including research on 4,193 first-year students in the fall of 2006. They then followed up on surveys conducted on these same compensated students in 2010 (Parker et al., 2016). The research focused mainly on the moral development of the students. One of the primary outcomes that they found from this research was evidence supporting diversity courses having a positive impact on the moral development of the student (Parker et al., 2016). "Diversity course content can promote students' moral discernment regarding fundamental matters of human dignity and respectful conduct across a range of differences, especially racial differences, thus contributing to a more positive and affirming campus climate" (Parker et al., 2016, p. 395). Many other articles focused on diversity-related work found similar outcomes in students' moral development (Rynes & Rosen, 1995). Not only did the authors of this article see an increase in moral development, but relating their research to other studies conducted, they found a correlation between diversity courses and different types of student development. Examples of positive change that they found were cognitive and academic development, psychological well-being, civic engagement, social justice and action, and bias reduction (Parker et al., 2016). They even found a more significant increase in the student's academic development. "Further, the findings revealed that students who enter college with lower pre-college academic ability might experience greater gains relating to the impact of diversity coursework on their moral growth" (Parker et al., 2016, p.395). The authors of this article made the argument that students that get involved with diversity training see several improvements in their character development, stating, "Moreover, this study affirms the salience of diversity-oriented courses as a curricular strategy that leads to students developing greater capacities to navigate moral dilemmas with the sort of deliberation that accounts not only for

their self-interests but for the shared interests of those around them and the collective aspirations that their communities seek to advance" (Parker et al., 2016, p. 408). Parker et al. expresses that students care less about their own self-interests and more about the common good of every individual, which directly ties back to Kholbergs final 5th and 6th stages.

Many authors argue that diversity initiatives have a positive impact on the student. However, it is still unknown if this training has a long-term positive effect on racial bias. In Nida Denson's study, they provide a meta-analysis on just that. Because of the ever-changing tides of a diverse world, there are many inconsistencies in the research findings on the impact of diversity training. That is why Denson's decided to explore this issue by providing a quantitative synthesis of these racial issues to date (Denson, 2009). Denson found from this study that diversity activities have a positive short-term effect on racial bias and include a positive long-term impact. "This meta-analytic review has established that there is indeed value in implementing diversity-related programs on college campuses. Institutions that currently have these diversity-related interventions already in place may be reassured that these various activities are generally effective in reducing students' racial bias" (Denson, 2009, p. 827). Even with the positive findings, there are still many factors included in the overall magnitude of impact provided by this study. Some factors that play a role in the overall effect are the institution's general level of support, comprehensiveness of approach, and racial composition. Finally, according to Denson, the most crucial factor is the different groups of students' interaction levels with each other during this process (Denson, 2009). According to this study, most diversity programs have positively impacted students, but other factors can affect how much a student is impacted. A college or university must look at how they can help make these diversity and inclusion initiatives more successful. Many studies have addressed that there is still a lack of information

regarding diversity-related work, as colleges are lagging in implementing some of these issues. "There is still much that needs to be done to enhance college leadership, institutional support, professional development, and behavior models for advancing the teaching of diversity." (Smolen et al., 2006, p. 60).

It also is essential to look at the different diversity ideologies when studying the impacts of diversity initiatives. An example is color blindness vs. multiculturalism. These different ideologies impact a student's sense of belonging. Shaheed and Kiang also found this same impact when looking at white students and students of color from a predominantly white institution (PWI) (2021). Taking a colorblind or multicultural approach significantly affects students' sense of belonging. In this study, Shaheed and Kiang found that students primed with multiculturalism reported greater comfort with interracial interactions (Shaheed and Kiang, 2021). This is critical because students of color have a lower sense of belonging to their community and campus than their white peers at a PWI. How a university can start to combat this, is by adding a greater focus on cross-racial relationships.

> "As research has found positive cross-racial relationships on campuses to be associated with a greater sense of belonging for students of color it is possible that promoting multiculturalism to foster these relationships may be a first step to improving belonging for students of color at PWIs" (Shaheed and Kiang, 2021, p. 1038).

This study clearly shows how valuable it is to endorse multicultural approaches and initiatives in a university setting. Creating this will provide a better sense of belonging to all students and foster a new sense of belonging for minoritized groups among the majority.

One of the common misconceptions throughout all diversity initiatives and programs is that it will cause white individuals to feel excluded. While that is a valid concern, it is the opposite. Multiple studies, such as those by Celeste et al., Museus et al., and Villalpando, 2002 have found that implementing more diversity and inclusion practices at a university benefit all students, including white students (Celeste et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2018; and Villalpando, 2002). It has been shown to increase white students' understanding of other cultures and openness to inclusiveness, connecting it to Kohlberg's fifth and sixth stages, moving them along the moral development path. Bringing more diversity and inclusion into a university setting is mandatory for improving the moral development of all students. A student cannot morally or personally develop if they are in survival mode. They need to be in a safe, accepting environment. If a student is just trying to survive, then their moral and ethical improvements are just a paradigm. Adding DEI initiatives and focusing on creating inclusive environments will help improve the moral development of predominantly white students and create a safe environment that can improve minority students' moral development. Moral development should be integrated into everything that a university has to offer. It especially should be integrated into a student's morals and ethics relating to DEI.

DEI is a Part of Today's Environment:

Implementing DEI programs into university academics brings numerous positive impacts, but it is becoming more needed in today's ever-changing society. America will become more diverse in the future. According to the United States Census Bureau, by 2024, the white population is predicted to peak then slowly decrease, leading to the year 2060 when the White population is estimated to lose nearly 20.6 million people. On the other hand, the Census Bureau

suggests that the Hispanic population will more than double during this same time period, meaning one in three US residents will be Hispanic or Latino. The Black and African American population is expected to rise by over 20 million, bringing them from 13.1 percent to 14.7 percent. The Asian population is expected to double, bringing their population from 5.1 percent to 8.2 percent. Many other minority groups are also showing an increase in population (US Census Bureau, 2012). The United States becoming more diverse shows why it is evidently essential to encourage and increase diversity training and moral growth in higher education environments. The United States is projected to become a majority-"minority" nation by 2043. Currently, minorities make up 37 percent of the United States population, but by 2060, they are predicted to make up 57 percent of the population (US Census Bureau, 2012). While it can be argued that many colleges and universities have done a fantastic job providing more diversity awareness in the college atmosphere, there is no denying that countless colleges still do not involve diversity initiatives in their curriculum enough, which could lead to numerous consequences in the future for the United States of America.

Furthermore, students' "cognitive motivation, enjoyment of engaging in effortful thinking, and pre-college academic preparation are positively related to their moral reasoning development" (Mayhew, 2012, p. 383). Considering how institutions shape students' moral reasoning development, they must foster educational environments that are inclusive and equitable and allow all students to cultivate a sense of belonging and community. Otherwise, students may "not be in an environment that spurs moral growth" (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010, p. 479). However, fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments at predominantly white institutions may be difficult because an institution's culture, climate, and organization typically adhere to Eurocentric traditions, values, and norms that set the standard for ways of

knowing and existing. Therefore, institutions must critically examine their roles in perpetuating inequality and fostering exclusive, inequitable, and hostile environments against marginalized and underrepresented student populations. A key component of facilitating inclusive educational environments and shaping moral reasoning development is acknowledging that each student has their own specific needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Institutions need programs, resources, initiatives, spaces, and faculty and staff that are authentically, morally, and enthusiastically committed to fostering the moral, mental, intellectual, emotional, professional, and personal development of each student to ensure their retention, persistence, learning, satisfaction, and completion. Otherwise, students may enter these spaces feeling unsupported, helpless, and as if they do not belong. College is expensive and requires money, time, effort, and commitment. It only seems right and fair that students have an incredible experience and can grow, be challenged, broaden their perspectives in unimaginable ways, and achieve their educational goals.

Summary:

When looking at the moral development of students, it is clear that social welfare is a very important aspect. Kholberg, Rest, & Gilligan all brought different approaches to how they see moral development, but something that they all can agree on is the importance of caring for others. DEI initiatives focus on caring for others. The goal of DEI initiatives is to create inclusive environments where each individual is treated as equals. Implementing these types of initiatives shows that there are numerous positive impacts that it can bring. Not only has it shown an increase in the moral development of students, but many more impacts as well. While Lawrence Kohlberg is not alive to confirm this, I would argue that they would agree with my stance, that implementing DEI initiatives can help improve the moral development of the college student.

Conclusion

Diversity programs look to build equality, dignity, and respect for all. That same attitude is what Kohlberg expressed in his moral development theory. By making DEI training and initiatives into the student's education, a student will then become more empathic and accepting. They will create a more significant stake in the social welfare of others, which will result in many individuals finally achieving the 5th and 6th steps. The most widely accepted moral development theory explained that most people would never make the 5 & 6th stages in their life but never really gave an answer on how to change that. Adding more DEI into the student's life is the answer. It would be building a stronger community and achieving the goals set out by government actions, core values, and mission statements of the university, and the organization's purposes created to push forward the moral development of college students. All arrows point towards implementing more DEI into academia as it has positively affected every example studied. The only problem with this notion is how to implement it successfully. How can a university successfully implement these ideas by improving students' moral development and creating a safe, inclusive environment?

Chapter 3

Introduction

This paper has claimed that DEI initiatives are the solution to improving the moral development of a college student. Adding more inclusion practices into a student's life will help the students finally reach Kohlberg's 5th and 6th steps and allow them to better understand the social well-being of others. What this paper hasn't done is analyze how to create these DEI initiatives. There would be 'zero validity' in this paper unless I can provide the readers with

reasonable practices on how to best address these issues. In chapter 3, I will break down each step of the solution, and show how a university can implement this. I will also show the direct impacts of this practice and what they might expect to achieve with these practices. I then will break down different ways they can evaluate these new improvements and how to make adjustments in the future. This chapter aims to create a baseline of ideas that each university should implement. These steps help build the foundations of a culture embedded with equity and inclusion.

Components

There are three overlying components to this project which I believe will help build the moral development of the student. If a university follows these components, they will see the students' moral development rise and create a better inclusive environment on campus. These three components, if implemented, will create an inclusive environment that encourages a student's moral development. They will attack the culture and standard of the university and bring newfound motivation for change. Following these three components will bring not only a culture swing but other types of positive impact such as an improvement in retention rate and overall academic success (Talbert, 2012;Parker et al., 2016). The three components are *Mandatory Moral Development Training for First-Year Students*, diversifying the staff and faculty, and supporting the students.

Mandatory Character Development Training for First-Year Students

The first and most important component of this project is mandatory moral development training for first-year students. This training is focused on the character development of the

student but will bring in an abundance of diversity knowledge, equitable practices, and the overall inclusiveness of the individual. This class will be primarily focused on the social well-being of others. While focused on social well-being, it is important to add different aspects of character development as well. Some examples of this are critical thinking, communication, decision-making, and ethical dilemmas. The overall goal of this class is to improve the character development as a whole. Please see appendix A for an example of a book that should be read and discussed throughout the duration of the class and appendix B for examples of lessons that should be added to this course.

In Devine & Ash's (2022) study, they examined hundreds of articles focused on DEI training. This included goals, limitations, and best practices. In this study, they found that classes held for a semester-long that focus on the psychology of prejudice, women studies, human sexuality, etc. associated a positive impact on historically marginalized groups (Devine & Ash, 2022). Courses that focused on a quasi-experimental design, that allowed students to gain more of an education on the complex histories and perspectives of members from historically marginalized groups were very beneficial and can provide positive impacts by the end of the semester (Devine & Ash, 2022). Looking at the research provided, a quasi-experimental approach to a semester-long class focused on first-year students will provide the best results for the first component of this project.

Diversifying Staff & Faculty

Mentorship is a significant part of a student's character development and academic journey. While many students have an abundance of potential mentors in their community, students of color or different types of identities do not have that mentorship. A diverse faculty

and staff can serve as mentors while also providing a more significant commitment to a more diverse campus climate, thus creating comfortable and inclusive environments, diversifying perspectives on teaching and learning, and finally creating a more pluralistic view of higher education (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). To create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all students, they must look to hire diverse individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Having a diverse group of mentors will directly impact the overall culture of the university and create an environment focused on successfully fostering a student's moral development. Outlined in this component are four steps to creating that strong mentorship and culture swing at a university.

1. Diversify the universities board

 When looking to diversify a university's staff and faculty, they must start from the very top. They need to have a diverse board of trustees to help make important decisions. The board of trustees requires not only to appoint a diverse staff but also to create commonality between them about the goals they're looking to fulfill. A very proactive president can look to make a change, but nothing will happen without the board's approval. The first step to diversifying the board is assessing the gaps in the board's demographics, experiences, and professions (Collado, 2021). If focusing on diversifying the demographics and experiences, the board will naturally start to diversify. Once the board begins to diversify, the conversations will begin to switch and look to become more equitable for all students (Brown, 2021).

2. Redefining how we hire new employees

Now that a university has started at the very top, they must rethink how they can build a search committee. Search committees have not shown success in creating a more diverse hiring pool in the past, so we must look to change that. A search committee should be very diligent in defining what diversity means to them. Each search committee should have these conversations before reviewing their first candidate. Being transparent about this should reinforce this notion of inclusive hiring practices (Leske & Pendleton, 2021). Next, checking and rechecking the biases a search committee might have. Everyone has some type of bias, whether conscious or unconscious, so it is crucial to address these biases. Remaining unbiased in this hiring process is very important, so calling out bias should be an ongoing conversation each committee poses (Leske & Pendleton, 2021). A search committee should also look to redefine what the interview process appears as to others. "Sometimes the interview process itself is a barrier to diversity" (Leske & Pendleton, 2021, p. 58). Many of the questions asked are focused on experience and require examples. The committee members are then predisposed to listen for different cues relevant to their specific university. That is an example of how similar backgrounds are a significant advantage in the hiring process and what can create a barrier to creating a more diverse community. Being open to different perspectives and answers that are not connected to a specific university is an essential rule of thumb for each committee member (Leske & Pendleton, 2021). The final step that could also help improve the hiring practices is cluster hiring. Cluster hiring is a practice used to boost the number of diverse employees added to the company. While this is an aggressive approach, it can bring in a diverse pool of candidates with different backgrounds and experiences. Creating a cluster hire can help build a specific interest in hiring a more diverse group. It also requires strong logistical communication, a longer time

commitment of current employees, and the financial resources for these new employees (Freemon, 2021). Paring all these hiring strategies to hire a more diverse staff can be a foundation of a strong hiring committee.

3. Transparency is key

When creating this culture switch, it is imperative to be transparent. A university needs to be transparent about the goal of diversifying staff and faculty employees and not treat it as a secret. This switch should not be some hidden agenda that the board or higher-up admin is hiding from the community. Even if there are moments of discomfort and tension, that is to be expected and is a good thing. Being a little uncomfortable actually shows growth. When a university is transparent, they can create more opportunities for open communication between the community. Starting this discussion will better understand community members and show the community that the university is focused on moving forward and pushing for change (Brown, 2021).

4. This is an urgent issue

Finally, and arguably the most critical aspect of diversifying the staff and faculty is to stop making excuses. The excuse of being a predominantly white college is no longer valid for why they are not becoming a more diverse campus. "Students are tired of attending institutions that do not affirm who they are" (Collado, 2020, p. 76). A school could get away with those excuses in the past, but now it is time to seize the opportunity and hold an entire community accountable. It is essential to treat this as an urgent situation. If a university is not becoming more diverse or inclusive, that needs to be addressed. It cannot be some long-term

goal that keeps getting put behind. Treat that as a priority. Holding yourself and your community personally accountable. A university is responsible for its environment and culture; therefore, each individual is partially at fault for the university not moving forward.

Supporting the Students

Colleges and universities excel at supporting students academically. There are many different support systems from tutoring, disability services, etc. Where universities need to improve is their support for the student's identities and development. Students will not succeed academically unless they are in a safe, inclusive environment. We need to create a support system for the students so they can be successful in academics and improve their moral and character development. How a university can succeed in this by supporting a student's identities and making them feel comfortable. A myth has been created that adding support systems is like a piece of pizza. If a slice was taken and put into one area of support, that is taking away a slice from another support system. There is a limited number of resources and a university must pick and choose what areas to support. If chosen to support one specific identity, then it unintentionally hurts another identity. That myth is entirely wrong. Rather than picking and choosing who to support, creating that inclusive environment and producing that welcoming culture will end up helping all students. Rather than a slice of a pizza, think of it as a topping. Each new support system is an extra topping that makes the pizza better. Each topping will make the university one step closer to creating an environment focused on a student's moral development. This component is broken up into three steps that must be taken to be successful.

1. Students deserve a voice

The first way to support the students and give them a sense of belonging in their community is by giving them a more prominent voice. Letting students be involved in the decision-making of the university is crucial. Even if the students can not be involved in some decisions, be very transparent with them. Giving students a more prominent voice will help them feel more included and be a member of that community. Let the students be involved in the hiring process, provide feedback, and join the budget meetings. If a student pays money to attend this university, they should at least be given a seat at the table. While a university can not let students make all decisions, it is essential to have them support themselves. There should be a focus on letting the students decide what initiatives and support systems they need. Creating a student-driven support system will be more successful than one provided by the university because they feel attached to that project. For example, a faculty-driven political discussion might have less turnout than a student-led discussion. When a student feels like they have a voice in the community and the opportunity to change the culture, it will support the student and help build the overall development of the environment (Celeste et al., 2019).

2. Engagement outside the classroom

When looking to support students, a university needs to provide opportunities for engagement outside the classrooms. For example, this can be groups, clubs, organizations, or anything with the sole purpose of connecting to the campus community (Quaye et al., 2019). Studies have shown a much lower engagement rate among students of color who attend predominantly white institutions. Students with a lower rate of engagement and campus organizations bring a hostile campus environment (Quaye et al., 2019). The students reported

that they choose not to get as involved because they do not feel as if those clubs or organizations reflect their cultural interests. Something very similar to a co-curricular engagement is a safe or validating space. "Subcultures in spaces that reflect the cultural background of students can function as safe spaces, instrumental in reducing the feeling of isolation, marginality, and alienation among communities of color" (Quaye et al., 2019, p. 20). Creating these different safe spaces on campus gives marginalized groups a physical location that brings nothing but comfortability. These marginalized groups are living in an environment where they do not always feel safe and welcome because of their differences, so these groups must have this space. It is argued that the safe spaces isolate or alienate groups even more, but studies have shown that students feel more accepted when the spaces are provided (Quaye et al., 2019). They might feel more accepted in the spaces because these areas offer opportunities for students to interact with other students who have similar backgrounds, experiences, and interests. In a predominantly white institution, finding people that are similar to you is essential for a student's sense of longing and mental health (Quaye et al., 2019).

3. Evaluating curricular content

      Creating diverse and inclusive co-curricular practices is vital for building a welcoming environment, but the work does not stop there. A university must take a deeper dive into the curricular content. There are many problems with the academic content because it takes a very Euro-centric response. These Euro-centric lessons are seen in the classroom readings and discussions, giving dominant exposure to western literature and white backgrounds (Quaye, 2019, p. 21). "Curriculum focused on Western or dominant cultures

sends the message to students of color that whiteness is normal and the other practices of belief from different cultures are not valued" (Quaye et al., 2019, p. 17). It also devalues the knowledge and experience that students of color or other marginalized groups possess. These experiences and knowledge are rarely seen in the higher education academic setting. It is imperative that a university takes a deep dive into its curriculum and looks to find ways where it can implement a more diverse background of information. Researchers have shown that students of color are more engaged and thriving when the curriculum reflects all cultural backgrounds. Adding those different backgrounds can simultaneously build acceptance of minority students while creating more understanding for all students (Quaye et al., 2019). Something that also should be addressed when looking at these new academics is not using minority students like the ones having to educate the rest of the class. Marginalized students do not have to reaffirm everything the professor is saying. The students are tired of talking about why it is necessary or what is right from wrong. The professors must be an expert in the field so that they won't have to rely on a student's experience. Adding more culturally appropriate classes shows the interests of the university and creates an inclusive, equitable environment. Even offering some courses in Spanish can help affirm the belonging of minority students (Quaye et al., 2019). Redefining a college's curriculum should be an upfront goal for every university.

Those are some ways to support the students, but something that needs to be addressed is looking past just the quantitative aspects. If a university has a high number of Hispanic students, they may become a Hispanic serving institution (HSI). While it is great that they are reaching that 25% margin of enrolled Hispanic students, what is the university doing to support them? Are

they helping those students, or is it a product of a university's demographics? Yes, having a diverse amount of students is excellent, but they need to push further than that. They need to be a university that supports a diverse amount of students. Understanding the demographics of the university and supporting those groups is the first step. Do not use minority groups as an advertising tool, but instead create such an inclusive, welcoming environment that the university becomes a location where these minority groups want to attend.

Evaluation

The evaluation or assessment is broken up into two portions: Rest's Defining Issues test and quantitative data. These two steps of evaluation will create a pattern that helps define if the universities DEI initiated are helping build the moral development of the student. It also will address if the solutions (3 components) provided in this paper have been successful.

Rest's Defining Issues Tests:

Also known as DIT, is also one of the most widely tested assessments and individuals' moral development and moral reasoning skills. This test was created by James Rest in 1974 (Rest & Narvaez, 2000). While this test is complicated and does not provide a right or wrong answer, it breaks down the student's moral reasoning and decision-making. A university should have the students take this moral test during the mandatory character development class for all first year students. Having the students take this test will provide a baseline for the results in the future. Later down the line, this same test will be given as a graduation requirement. The university will then compare the results of the exact students. This will show how the students morally progressed throughout their years at this university. While there are many variables in this

assessment, this should give a wide variety of data that can be studied and explored. It is important for each university to address the standards they are looking to achieve in these four years. If the standards are not up to par, then a university must reevaluate how they are handling the moral development of students.

Quantitative Data:

Alongside DIT, qualitative data will be the second portion of assessment. I would assess these components by looking at the demographic of the university. Not only looking at the demographics of the students but also the faculty and staff. Addressing the questions below will provide a better understanding of the demographics of a university.

- What percent of faculty and staff are now minorities individuals? Did the new hiring techniques improve that number?
- What are the demographics of the students? How have the new support systems affected the student's makeup?
- Has the university gained more minority students, and have the support systems put into place started to receive more and more action?
- What does the retention rate of minority students look like? As mentioned previously, are the students continuing to stay at the university and be successful?

These questions and evaluations of the demographics should be studied each year. It might be a couple of years to see actual change, but it is vital to keep up with these assessments so that a university can see the impacts on the students. Starting the assessment before the three components of this project is vital, so that a university can see its growth and change in the demographics.

This assessment piece has been comprehensive because I believe that each university should create its own specific assessment. There should be a focus on the 2 portions mentioned, but each university should take a different angle that best fits. Addressing the student's moral development, the demographics, and the university's overall culture should be a goal each university looks to define when they assess this program.

Conclusion and Plans of Implementation

Universities are stimulating more than just a student's educational development, but the student's character and moral development. A university can improve that development by strategically using DEI initiatives to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment. Creating a greater focus on social welfare will achieve Kohlberg's 5th and 6th stages. A university should focus on creating a more diverse background of staff and faculty members and providing more support to minoritized students.

Creating a more diverse board of trustees, reviewing the search committee process, eliminating the "scapegoat" attitude on the token diversity position, being transparent in the university's diversity goals, and no longer making excuses are a couple of strategies to help diversify a university's employees. Creating a more diverse staff and faculty can help mentor students in their moral development goals and push a culture change into a more welcoming environment. Supporting a student's identity on top of supporting their academics is also an essential aspect of their moral development. Creating that safe and inclusive environment is mandatory for a student to succeed. Improving the students' voice in the community, adding a specific inclusive intent on co-curricular, and reevaluating the current curriculum are all ways that can better support students.

Implementing these components will create a more inclusive environment and improve students' moral development. Alongside enhancing the student's moral development, these DEI initiatives can improve the retention rate and students' academic success. It is a university's obligation to enhance moral development and create a safe environment for students to succeed. It is time that universities start to support all their students and their specific needs, and it is time for them to become champions of justice.

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Appendix A:

Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People by Mahzarin R. Banaji.
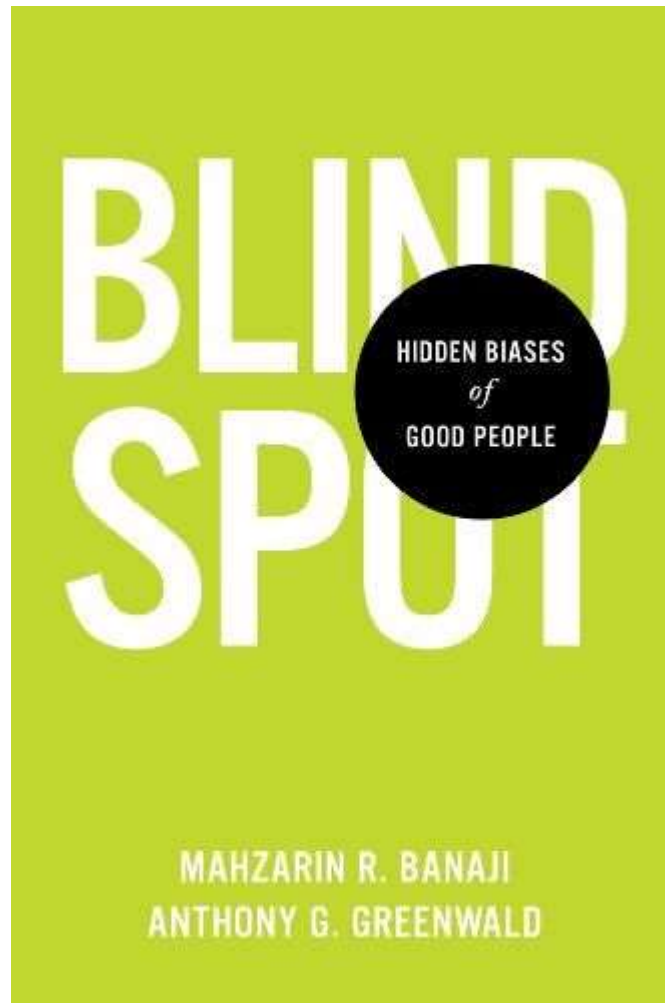
  "Accessible and authoritative . . . While we may not have much power to eradicate our own prejudices, we can counteract them. The first step is to turn a hidden bias into a visible one. . . . What if we're not the magnanimous people we think we are?"—The Washington Post

  "Conversational . . . easy to read, and best of all, it has the potential, at least, to change the way you think about yourself."—Leonard Mlodinow, The New York Review of Books

Appendix B:

Attached below is a link to NC states inclusion training guide it includes multiple fun activities that promote DEI initiatives:

https://dasa.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Inclusion101TrainingGuide2012-NASPA-2019.pdf