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## Addressing Bias From Faculty Through Implementing Bias Training

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Addressing Bias from Faculty in Higher Education by

Implementing Bias Training

by

Tori Henning

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Master's Project

Submitted to the College of Education

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At Grand Valley State University

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Degree of Master of Education



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

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## Abstract

Research has indicated that college students experience bias from college faculty on a regular basis. However, there is no mandated training for college faculty on the various forms of bias and the impact that it can have on students' ability to be successful. While bias influences many students, students of color, women, LGBTQ+ students, and students from different ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds experience bias at greater rates than white students. This project explores how the various forms of bias, the training that college faculty receive, student development theory, and how bias impacts students' success and their sense of belonging in the greater campus community. It is proposed that implementing bias training for college faculty will increase student retention and motivation, specifically from these underrepresented populations of students. Ultimately, this project argues about the need for faculty to engage in bias training so that they can better understand the diverse population of students and the systemic issues that certain populations serve and how they can create more equitable and inclusive environments for all students.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Problem Statement

Higher education institutions are consistently being plagued with bias. Whether this bias is based on race, gender, sexuality, or sexual orientation, it exists on every college campus. In addition, it has contributed to the use of various forms of stereotypes, such as microaggressions, against students in vulnerable populations. The gaps in student achievement and the racial divide between student, faculty, and other university staff has only increased in the past 10 years (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). There has also been a subtle uptick in racially based hate crimes and actions of discrimination against underrepresented populations of students (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017). While this is definitely concerning, a large majority of students (over 32%) claim that the majority of bias-based incidents happen in the classroom (Boysen, 2009).

Attempting to address these issues and create more diverse and inclusive environments on college campuses, universities have started hosting events for administrative staff. Typically, these workshops are focused on educating the administration on what the college is doing to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, research suggests that these workshops are causing more harm than good (Cox. et. al. 2022). While administrative staff such as advisors, success coaches, department directors, office assistants etc., interact with students daily, the university staff who see students most often are professors. Recent research has shown that students experience significant instances of bias and prejudice from faculty (i.e., college professors) (Boysen et. al. 2009). Now, most instances of bias are unconscious, and they happen habitually from what society has shown us is “right” or “normal” (Cox & Devine, 2022). Yet, these biases have dramatic impacts on students' college experiences including their ability to be



successful, and their sense of belonging. Universities need a new approach to training faculty on how to eliminate bias within themselves, their departments, and within their classrooms.

Additionally, this approach needs to consider student development and what students need to feel seen, safe, and understood in the greater campus community.

### **Rationale For Project**

Every person within our society has encountered bias. Within the context of higher education, these biases are present in the form of microaggressions, stereotypes, gender bias, and prejudice against specific populations of students. While a lot of these biases exist unconsciously in our brains, we often forget how our own internal biases influence the way we perceive underrepresented populations. As colleges and universities continue to bring in more diverse first-year students, these institutions are realizing that they don't have the proper resources or tools to support the needs of all students.

Research has shown that biases and stereotypes are often felt unevenly more by non-white, non-cis gendered, and/or non-male students (Bingham, T., & Nix, S. J. 2010). Because of this, a large number of universities create DEI initiatives or workshops so that campus departments can discuss how they can better promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in their organization. However, professors are not required to attend these events even though they interact more often with students daily in classes and in their office hours.

According to William Cox (2022), DEI workshops are becoming more popular at universities. However, Cox argues that these workshops are centered around deficit thinking and that they never empower participants at the workshop to change their mindsets or beliefs. This is because DEI training assumes that issues regarding bias happen because there is a lack of

administrator “knowledge of biases, racism, sexism, and other DEI issues and that providing information on these issues will help them create significant cognitive change” (Cox, 2022). This method is not evidence-based and there isn’t scientific proof that these DEI workshops increase equity or inclusion. Overall, the intention behind these workshops is good, however, we need a different approach in addressing bias and other forms of prejudice on college campuses and university faculty need to feel empowered to change.

In addition, one example of bias existing within the college classroom was found in a study done by Copur-Gencturk and colleagues (2020), where they asked professors to rate students' mathematical ability. The rating professors were told the race, gender, and ethnicity of the students they were evaluating. The results showed a bias existed specifically in terms of the race and gender of the students. Professors were more likely to rate a student's math ability lower if they were female, Black, or Hispanic. Even though all of the students in the study solved the math problem correctly. There are many studies that have found similar results, and while these biases might not be intentional it presents the question on how we can train professors to address their own internal biases.

Also, it is important to acknowledge that most colleges and universities within the United States are PWI’s or Primarily White Institutions. In fact, most students of color attend PWI’s (72%), compared to those who enroll at a Historically Black Colleges (28%) (Smith, 2015). More dramatically, when we look at graduation rates of Black students at PWI’s it is significantly lower than the graduation rates of White students at the same institution (Smith, 2015). These statistics show us that there is a systematic difference between the academic success of White students within higher education versus the academic success of Black students in education. In order to understand this gap in achievement, universities and their faculty need

to better understand the role of bias, stereotypes, and systemic racism that still exists with our society and higher education.

### **Background**

This project will specifically be looking at unconscious bias or implicit bias.

Unconscious bias was first studied and identified in 1995 by Mazarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald (Suveren, 2022). These two researchers studied human cognition and they often referred to unconscious bias as stereotyping and defined it as happening uncontrollably. They explained, “Although most people may assume they are not susceptible to biases and stereotypes, they cannot avoid engaging in them. This implies that the human brain is working in a manner that creates associations and generalizations” (p. 415). Essentially, this means that our brain prefers simplicity and placing people into groups that make sense to us. Suveren (2022), explains that human conditioning heavily influences unconscious bias. This means that our bias assigns meaning to the groups that people belong to and these groups are shaped by our cultural upbringing, media portrayals, and by our personal experiences. For instance, if you were a woman and you grew up in a family where you were consistently told by your family that your role as a woman is not to pursue a career but to marry a man, have children, and take care of your family, you will begin to believe this role of women and you will start to generalize this role onto all women in society. This is because our brain wants to make things simple, so we don’t have to think critically or constantly create new processes to categorize people. So, when we look at university professors, who engage with hundreds of students each day in their classrooms, it would make sense that they would use their unconscious biases that they’ve had since childhood to place students into categories.

More specifically, when we look at experiences of students of color, primarily Black students, they are far more likely to experience biases such as racism, discrimination, and microaggressions (Lewis et. al. 2021). According to a study by Kristen Mills (2019), students of color who experience racial microaggressions, such as low academic expectations from faculty or a lack of support from faculty, experience a decrease in their academic performance. In the study, they argue that the majority of microaggressions and biases come from students and faculty at institutions where the majority of the populations are White.

Some examples of current racially biased microaggressions are unequal treatment, racial slurs, hostility, general discomfort, dominant egocentric ideas of beauty, and colorblind ideology (Mills, 2019). In Mill's study, they focused on the existence of racially biased microaggressions at a large Midwestern university where the majority of their students and faculty were White. Students of color at this institution identified multiple different racial microaggressions that they experienced on campus, which were segregation, lack of representation, campus responses to criminality, cultural bias in university courses, and pressure to conform. Moreover, many Black students described themselves as feeling hurt by the lack of cultural awareness and Black historical education of their professors (Mills, 2019). This lack of acknowledgement and education within university professors furthers the racial divide between Black and White and increases the presence of stereotypes, microaggressions, and bias at universities.

Historically, bias and other forms of discrimination are far more likely to impact Black students, female students, and students who identify within the LGBTQ+ community at these institutions. Hurtado and Ruiz Alvarado (2015) found that 20% of Black students and 14.5% of Latino students report a bias incident that happened to them on a college campus. Their data also showed that most bias incidents go unreported due to fear of further discrimination or some sort

of additional penalty from staff or students at the institution. Furthermore, in 2015, 62% of Latino students reported experiencing discriminatory verbal remarks from other students and university staff and almost 33% of Latino students reported visually offensive images on campus (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). This data is also representative of Black students and other students who exist within underrepresented populations. The consequences of these groups of students experiencing bias are that they often feel a decreased sense of belonging and a decrease in retention. Considering this data, campus officials need new strategies in addressing bias and discrimination at their institutions. The DEI workshops are no longer an efficient way to train faculty, staff, and students' techniques to eliminate bias and create meaningful change.

Globally, organizations have spent eight billion dollars on DEI training (Cox, 2022). In an article written by a news organization called "INSIGHT" who dives into University budgeting and spending. They saw that in 2019, DEI training makes up only one percent of university spending. With the increase of enrollment from marginalized populations of students, allocating more funds and training to intentionally increase inclusion and equity on college campuses is needed. Additionally, researchers have found that workshops where the goal is to decrease the influence of bias in their organization by promoting anti-bias tendencies results in an increase in unconscious bias (Legault et al., 2011). This statistic further proves the need for universities to reevaluate their methods for training faculty on how to avoid bias and how to create more inclusive environments where their students can be successful.

While bias has been present since the beginning of higher education, organizations have had DEI programs since the 1960s (Dobin & Kalve, 2013). In the early years, these programs helped establish equal opportunity employment policies, diversity training, various mentoring programs, and many other policies that are still used today. According to Cox (2022), these

workshops often employ deficit thinking when discussing issues within diversity and inclusion. This mindset in DEI training refers to problems of bias, stereotypes, racism and other forms of prejudice as issues that happen because of a lack of information. In reality, it isn't that simple. There is a lack of information, but also a lack of motivation to change their behavior and/or beliefs. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding students' needs, specifically those students in underrepresented populations. In chapter two, I will illuminate on how influential deficit thinking is on student success and ways that it is used in college classrooms. Ultimately, these initiatives were important steps forward, however, with the constant changes in higher education policies and practices today, we need to reevaluate how we address biases at our institutions.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to better understand different forms of biases from faculty on college campuses and to implement intentional bias training for faculty. This intervention strategy will seek to increase knowledge and awareness of complex issues including institutional racism, sexism, and racial and gendered microaggressions and stereotypes, and homophobia. More specifically, this project is looking at university professors, all adjunct faculty, and full and part-time faculty. In addition, this project will use the Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (R-MMDI) when discussing the various forms of bias and when addressing the identity development of students. Using this theory will help analyze students through a lens of intersectionality and how students from underrepresented populations experience more bias and institutional racism than other vulnerable student populations.

First, this project will look at demographics of the most recent generation of students and faculty. Then, it will discuss different forms of biases and how students that experience bias are impacted both in academics and in their personal wellbeing. In chapter three, the project will present a potential solution to this problem of institutional bias at the hand of college faculty. This would be the implementation of a required bias training for all college faculty, where the emphasis is on not only addressing bias but specifically understanding student development through using R - MMPI. Utilizing this theory in the training, will provide awareness and knowledge for faculty on students identities and how they perceive bias within the classroom. This strategy for educating college faculty on bias was inspired by studies where they broke down bias through viewing it as a habit (Cox, 2022). Their method has been scientifically proven to reduce the use of unconscious biases and increase the awareness of racism, sexism, stereotypes, and microaggressions within large corporations and businesses. These studies have been very effective and prove that bias intervention is effective in empowering people to create more inclusive and equitable environments specifically for those in underrepresented groups.

### **Objectives of the Project**

As mentioned previously, the objective of this project is to understand how college students are influenced by various forms of bias from faculty and how to implement a bias workshop for faculty to address this issue. This project will accomplish this by investigating different kinds of bias and stereotypes on college campuses and how this impacts students' success and sense of belonging. The hope is that university professors will be able to break their bias habits in their classrooms and after completing this training they are empowered to create safe, inclusive, and brave spaces for the students they serve. This project will be able to communicate these habit-breaking techniques to university faculty and ideally these staff

members will be more equipped to bring these strategies into their classrooms so that students will gain more knowledge and insight into their own unconscious biases. In part three, I will discuss the implementation of a bias workshop for faculty and the various learning outcomes that will be included in the training.

### **Scope of the Project**

This project will explore faculty working at higher education institutions and the populations of students they serve. While bias certainly exists outside of higher education, this project will solely focus on faculty working at colleges and universities, not K12 institutions. While all universities (private and public) have a different set of principles that they follow (i.e., mission vision, and values), for the purpose of this project all universities will be grouped together because bias exists on all levels of higher education and in every societal context. Additionally, this project will explore how previous bias interventions for faculty have not worked and why there needs to be a systemic change in how we educate college professors on bias so that they can create a more equitable and inclusive environment for their students. In addition, this project will address how bias training in other professional settings has been scientifically proven to be successful in eliminating bias and has increased concern for marginalized populations.

There are several barriers that could arise with trying to implement university-wide workshops on breaking bias habits. For workshops of this size, it would most likely be handled in the University Development Department. This department is overseen by the President of the institution and by the Associate Vice President for University Development. These types of departments are in charge of approving and helping develop new university policies. Most likely



they would need to present these workshops in multiple days and would need to meet with different academic departments each day. Also, some university departments or staff members could challenge the techniques in these workshops, or it could be their personal belief that there is no bias, implicit or explicit, present at their university. This project is a starting point, to encourage higher education institutions to address bias and stereotypes that exist within their faculty. Also, to empower universities to improve their DEI seminars by utilizing habit-breaking strategies in their training, which is the only scientifically proven intervention to eliminate bias.

### Definition of Terms

**Bias:** an unreasoned and unfair distortion of judgment in favor of or against a person or thing (Merriam-Webster, 2022)

**Implicit Bias:** Spontaneous or automatic stereotype activation that can lead to biases in affect, behavior, cognition, sometimes without awareness (Cox & Devine, 2022).

**Stereotypes:** characteristics of a single person/group that we attribute to all of society.

**Microaggressions:** are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults typically towards people of color (Sue et. al. 2007).

**Bias Habit-Breaking:** A scientific evidence-based approach that argues that biases exist as a “habit of mind” and should be addressed by empowering people to intentionally change their cognitive understanding of bias, in order to increase equity and inclusion (Cox et. al. 2022).

Diversity: the act of bringing multiple cultures and identities together to share ideas, work together, and learn from each other.

Equity: freedom from bias or favoritism (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Inclusion: the act of including (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

DEI training: encompasses all types of training meant to create positive changes in bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion (Cox, 2022).

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

In order to understand the scope of bias and use of stereotypes of university faculty, we need to look at literature and decipher what it says about bias in higher education. In the last 10 years, the culture of colleges and universities has changed (Davaries, 2021). When you visit a university's website, you will most likely see their mission, vision, and values outlined on the front page. The mission statement and the university's values typically involve using words like “inclusive”, “diverse”, “equity”, or “education achievement” to describe their students and campus culture. However, we need to question how these institutions are empowering their students, what actions they are taking to protect their students from bias and confronting stereotypes, and all steps they are taking to live up to their mission and values. To better understand this, the literature will be examined using Abes, Jones, and McEwen’s (2007) Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. Using this theory allows us to evaluate the social identities of college students and discuss the role that bias, and stereotypes play in their academic success (Patten et al., 2016, p. 90).

After examining this theory, the paper will use the theory to discuss the demographics of the college student and faculty population, specifically when it comes to race, ethnicity, and gender identities. I will dive into the research on various types of bias that exists on college campuses and how faculty reinforce these biases within their classrooms. Then, the paper will address how underrepresented populations of students interpret and experience bias via college faculty. Utilizing the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, I will discuss the literature on training college faculty on issues of bias, stereotypes, and prejudice and their

preparedness of addressing such issues in their classroom. Lastly, I will use this theory to look at how students make meaning of their experiences involving biases and stereotypes and how this impacts their well-being and sense of belonging. Hopefully, the literature will provide a thorough analysis into bias and stereotypes within higher education and how students are impacted by faculty who have not had bias training. Overall, the goal is to understand how underrepresented students' success are impacted by biased faculty and how we can combat these issues with habit breaking training.

### **Theory**

The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (R-MMIDI) is a social identity theory that examines student identity development (Abes et al., 2007). For the purpose of this paper, it is important to understand the identity development of students and how they make meaning of their experiences. This theory deciphers how students take in information, assign meaning to their experiences, and then apply these experiences to their own self-perception (Patton et al., 2016, p. 90). The input of information could come from peers, family members, stereotypes, biases, or other societal influences. Once this information accumulates in our brains, according to Abes et al. (2007) we make meaning out of it and this impacts how we perceive ourselves and others around us. This specifically refers to our race, social class, sexual orientation, gender, and/or our religion (Patton et al., 2016). In addition, an important aspect of this theory is that the identity development of students is “intertwined, interactive, and unique for each individual” (p. 75). College students are constantly taking in information and trying to make sense of their environment and it is important for university faculty to be conscious of intersectionality. Intersectionality is an important aspect of this theory that describes the interconnectedness of college student's multiple identities (i.e., their race, ethnicity, gender, and

sexual orientation) (Abes et al., 2007). In a book by Lori Patton and her colleagues (2016), they explore a student's multiple dimensions of reality and identity development using an example of a Latina, Catholic lesbian woman. This woman, "will experience her identity differently in different campus contexts and over time; her ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and religious identities will influence one another; and she constructs her identity through performing it in daily interactions and in how she presents herself to others" (p. 87). Essentially, students' identities are layered. Their race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation play a role in how comfortable and safe the student feels in different campus environments. Ultimately, when faculty and staff interact with students, they need to have an awareness of the student's intersection of identities and the role it plays in their development.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this project is to address bias within university faculty in higher education and to implement an evidence-based training program on breaking down bias. Utilizing this R-MMDI will help address where bias comes from and how students are impacted. To start the analysis, I am going to look at the intersection of identities of students and faculty through looking at the data and literature regarding the demographics of these populations. Then, I will discuss the various types of bias within higher education and evaluate college faculty and their unconscious bias and how this contributes to faculty feeling underprepared to educate students on complex issues involving race, racism, sexism, and homophobia. This part of the project will conclude by looking at the training of college faculty on issues of racism and sexism. Lastly, I will use R-MDDI to look at how students make meaning out of incidents of bias and prejudice from college faculty and how it impacts their sense of belonging and ability to be successful. It is important to note that most of the data and literature comes from firsthand student experiences and their own evaluations of faculty and

professors that they encountered in their college experiences. The goal of this project is to emphasize the need for colleges and universities to develop or utilize new training workshops to address existing bias for their full-time and adjunct faculty.

## **Research**

### **Faculty & Student Demographics**

To better understand the existing biases in college faculty, we need to look at the demographics of those in this profession. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in 2020, almost 75% of faculty identified as White. Faculty who identify as White men made up 39% and faculty who identified as White women made up 35%. The next largest group of faculty members was men who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander 7% and 5% were women (NCES, 2020). In contrast, only 4% of faculty were Black women and only 3% of faculty were Black men. Now, when we look at the National Center for Educational Statistics demographics for student enrollment during 2020, 64 % identified as Asian, 41 % White, 36 % Hispanic, 36 % Black, 34% of students identified as Pacific Islanders and/or identified as two or more races, and lastly 22% identified as American Indian/Alaska Native (NCES, 2020). In addition, the overall enrollment of women during this time was higher than it was for men. Also, during this time the Postsecondary National Policy Institute looked at the statistics of LGBTQ+ students and their data identified 17% of college students identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning (NCES, 2020). Reflecting on these statistics is important because the diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in college students is continuing to increase. Whereas the college faculty who are responsible for educating these students is increasingly less diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Moreover, researchers have found that racial, ethnic, and gender gaps between college students and faculty exist across disciplines (Davis & Fry, 2019). Specifically, in STEM programs, research shows that Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Pacific Islander faculty are significantly underrepresented. In a study done by Anna Egalite and Brian Kisida (2017), they found that students' perceptions of professors are more positive if the professor aligns with the student's gender and racial identity. In fact, research indicated that the achievement gap in college classrooms shrinks by 20% to 50% if faculty more closely resemble their students (Failie, et al., 2014). The main point here is that as college student diversity continues to grow, college faculty need to be equipped to address these gaps in achievement and identify ways to create inclusive and empowering classrooms for all of their students.

### **Training College Faculty**

Acknowledging that the majority of college faculty are White and identify as cis-gendered, is an important step in addressing bias in higher education. While there is a variety of diversity and inclusion training for all college professionals, rarely are college professors required to attend these workshops. In a study done by Jane Davies (2021), she looked at college faculty who are responsible for teaching students who are pursuing a career in higher education. She argued that faculty, primarily White faculty, are “ill-equipped” to have open discussions on race and bias within higher education. It is explained that in the current political environment, and with the increase in social justice movements like Black Lives Matter, that “the training of teachers who will educate future generations, equipping them with the skills to thrive in a diverse society and an increasingly globalized world is therefore of paramount importance” (Davies, 2021). Furthermore, they describe addressing issues of race in higher education as “opening a can of worms” because it can evoke strong emotions and challenging conversations between

students and faculty. They argue that in order to fully address stereotypes, racism, and bias within education, faculty need to empower themselves to address these complex issues and challenge their students to do the same. Specifically, they claim that White faculty and students need to reflect on their privilege and Whiteness to become more aware of their unconscious bias. This study shows that college faculty are uncomfortable with addressing race and racism within their classroom because their past training glossed over these complex issues. This avoidance is extremely problematic because not only does it leave faculty unprepared, but it also creates a space for biases and stereotypes to exist and possibly grow.

In addition, it is argued that some universities have tried to implement implicit bias workshops for faculty but oftentimes these training reinforce the concept of white fragility (Applebaum, 2019). According to Applebaum (2019), white fragility “involves a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable and, thus, triggers a range of defensive moves that reduce discomfort”. Taking this into consideration, it could explain why past implicit bias training hasn’t worked for college faculty. As mentioned earlier in chapter two, the majority of college professors are White, so it could be argued that during these workshops the majority of college faculty feel uncomfortable or vulnerable “unlearning” their own biases. Applebaum says that this uncomfortability comes from faculty feeling guilt and shame over exhibiting bias and this causes them to feel white fragility, so they distance themselves from the systemic issues and try to “rationalize” their use of bias to soothe themselves (Applebaum, 2019). This distance further reinforces the institutional racism, bias, and prejudice that exists on college campuses. There needs to be a new approach in addressing these issues and addressing the white washing and white privilege that also plagues university culture.



To further emphasize the need for a bias training for college professors, I want to look at a study done by Boysen and their colleagues in 2009. These researchers evaluated incidents of bias within the college classroom from graduate students who were the instructors for a course being administered to undergraduate students. In addition, they looked at previous research on college professors' perceptions of bias in their classroom and how they handled incidents of bias. The results of this study indicated that 27% of professors perceived implicit bias in the classroom, which was similar to the perception of graduate instructors who reported 25%. However, the percentage of undergraduate students who reported seeing or experiencing bias in their classroom was both of those percentages combined at 63% (Boysen et al., 2009). In addition, 37% of undergraduate students perceived themselves to be a target of implicit bias. The most reported instances of bias were stereotyping (34%), offensive humor (28%), and insults (16%). These biases happened more significantly in relation to sex (36%), race/ethnicity (19%), religion (16%), and sexual orientation (5%).

Another important aspect of this research study was that professors, graduate instructors, and undergraduate students were asked to report how these incidents of bias were handled. The most frequent response was for the instructor to provide information, direct confrontation, group discussion, and ignore the incident entirely (Boysen et al., 2009). In fact, a significant number of undergraduate students mentioned that the instructor's response to bias was for them to join in or the undergraduate directly indicated that the professor was the source of bias. These findings are concerning because it shows that bias is happening more often in the classroom than professors are aware of. Also, due to a high percentage of undergraduate students reporting that professors simply ignore these subtle incidents of bias, there needs to be some sort of training intervention that teaches professors how to address issues of bias when they happen so that students,

specifically from underrepresented populations, feel seen, supported, and safe within their classroom.

## **Types of Bias & Impact on Student Populations**

### **Unconscious Bias**

For the purpose of this project, we will be explicitly looking at the most common type of bias, unconscious or implicit bias (Cox, 2022). According to Cox and colleagues (2022), unconscious biases are basically “habits of mind”. Biases happen when stereotypes influence our thoughts, feelings, and behavior without our intention or awareness. Researchers argue that this is our brain's way of taking shortcuts and making associations to simplify our experiences (Suveren, 2022). Additionally, looking at social identity theories, unconscious bias is strongly related to group membership and there is a connection between our cognitive processes and our belief systems (Howard & Bornstein, 2018). In other words, unconscious bias is directly related to the beliefs and perceptions of people that we surround ourselves with.

Additionally, there is evidence of unconscious bias taking place in children as old as six years old (Bian et. al. 2017). Bria and colleagues (2017) found that girls as young as six fall victims to the stereotyped belief that girls aren't as smart as boys. Similarly, this stereotype continues into adulthood and into postsecondary education for women. In professions such as mathematics, physics, and philosophy, women are significantly less likely to pursue degrees in these fields due to bias generalizations that were established in childhood (Bian et. al. 2017). Examining this type of research is important for this project because it helps us understand where unconscious bias comes from, how it manifests, and how it transcends into our beliefs as adults.

## Deficit Thinking

Deficit thinking is described as the idea that students of color, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and other students who belong to an underrepresented population are responsible for the oppression and discrimination that they face (Davis & Museus, 2019). Within the environment of higher education, this concept is important to understand because it is used to describe many student populations and it reinforces our unconscious biases and fails to acknowledge the culture of racism, oppression, and sexism in higher education.

The main aspects of deficit thinking involve using oppressive language or labels for student groups and maintaining a perspective of “blaming the victim” (Davis & Museus, 2019). Examples of labels or oppressive language involve grouping students and using words like “at-risk” or “marginalized” to describe historically oppressed student populations. Furthermore, researchers identified examples of deficit thinking within undergraduate STEM programs claiming that faculty labeled students from underrepresented populations as “at-risk” and “underprepared” (Castro, 2014). In this study done by Castro (2014), they saw that the term “at-risk” was specifically used to describe students of color and students from lower socioeconomic classes. This language is used to say that these students are “at-risk” of failing academically. According to Castro (2014), using deficit thinking within STEM programming significantly influenced students from underrepresented populations retention and academic success because it immediately labels these students as problems. This research proves how problematic deficit thinking is and how it reinforces systemic racism and oppressive ideologies within higher education. If college faculty want their students to be successful, they need to adopt more inclusive language within their classrooms.

## **Racial Bias**

As mentioned in chapter one, racial bias is where an individual can unknowingly act in discriminatory ways toward people of color. This type of bias also upholds concepts of systemic racism and oppression. In a research study by Gina Garcia and Marc Johnson-Gurrero (2015), they looked at racially biased incidents that happened on a handful of college campuses and found 205 incidents that were reported from 2010 to 2015. Most of these incidents were identified as microaggressions, while the others were simply described as “overt racism”.

Microaggressions, which are the most common form of bias to see on college campuses, are described as, “commonplace daily, verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities or insensitivities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to members of marginalized groups” (Murray, 2020). Oftentimes, microaggressions happen unconsciously by people whose intention is not to cause harm or to be discriminatory. Also, this form of bias can be non-verbal, like monuments, mascots, pictures in classrooms, statues, or plaques with famous slave owner names on them. For Black students who experience these microaggressions on a daily basis, the underlying discrimination can accumulate and begin to impact their ability to succeed in their college courses. Murray (2020) explains, “When students find the academic environment invalidating, characterized by persistent patterns of being overlooked, under-respected, and devalued as the result of belonging to a certain group, they tend to underperform despite having the ability to succeed”. Some other examples of racially biased incidents and microaggressions within the classroom are prejudging academic ability, devaluing culture and heritage, criminalizing behavior, making assumptions about students’ behavior, and expressing racially charged political beliefs in class (Sue, 2010).

## **Internalized Oppression**

Furthermore, these forms of racially motivated bias that are perpetuated and upheld by university faculty contribute to the internalized oppression of students of color. Internalized oppression is described as negative internal beliefs about oneself belonging to a specific group (Nadal et. al. 2021). An important factor of internalized oppression is that you begin to believe all the negative language and stereotypes associated with the group you belong to. For students of color and students within the LGBTQ+ community, this could be them believing the societal and cultural stereotypes that associate them with being less than. This specific type of internalized oppression is often referred to as stereotype threat, which is defined as, “a situational predicament in which negative biases about a person's social identity group negatively impacts their performance” (Nadal et. al. 2021). Exploring these different types of racially based stereotypes and biases is important because they impact a student’s ability to succeed and learn within a university classroom. If university faculty are not culturally aware of these issues and actively addressing them within their class, then these biases will impact their students' performance and wellness.

## **Perceptions of LGBTQ+ Students**

While racial bias and gender bias are the most prevalent forms of biases exhibited by college faculty, it is important to address perceptions of LGBTQ+ students. This involves addressing the culture of heterosexism in higher education. Within higher education LGBTQ+ students experience harassment, microaggressions, and blatant homophobia on college campuses (Taylor, 2015). In fact, in a study done in 2015 by Jason Taylor, LGBTQ+ students described campus environments as “hostile” and “unwelcoming” and they reported experiencing negative

interactions with college faculty. Also, college students in this study recalled that “heterosexist comments are often not challenged by faculty, and in some cases, perpetuated by faculty. Faculty may make heteronormative assumptions when discussing topics in class or during class activities, and they may fail to integrate LGBTQ topics and authors in their curriculum” (Taylor, 2015). This finding further proves that college faculty fall victim to their own biases, and it negatively impacts students’ ability to succeed. Providing a training program and comprehensive workshops on LGBTQ+ issues could help faculty assess their curriculum and change it, so it is more inclusive for this student population.

### **Gender Bias**

Another major form of bias that impacts faculty’s perspectives of students and impacts a student’s ability to perform and succeed is gender-based bias. Common stereotypes of men are that they are more dominant, intellectual, and hard working. Whereas women are thought of as sensitive, caring, and they typically are assigned the job of taking care of the house and children. According to a survey study taken in 2019, Suveren (2022) saw that 50% of men believed that they had more rights than women. In higher education, men make up a larger percentage of college professors than women, thus women experience more instances of sexism and gender stereotypes concerning their academic ability (Reid, 2010). For instance, in a study done by Yasmine Copur-Gencturk and colleagues (2020), they looked at college faculties’ perceptions of their students’ mathematical ability based on gender, race, and ethnicity. Their findings indicated that women student’s mathematical ability was rated lower compared to males, even though their solutions to the math problems presented in the study were the same. Additionally, the lowest rated group within the study was students who were non-white and female.

Addressing gender-based bias within higher education is gaining importance because women continue to outnumber men when it comes to college applications, enrollment, and graduation rates (Conger & Dickson, 2017). According to Conger and Dickson (2017), women make up 57% of college enrollees and they outnumber males in every state and nation in this category. Additionally, they outnumber college enrollees in every racial and ethnic group. These statistics are important to consider because despite their overwhelming enrollment in higher education, women are less likely to pursue degrees in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology (STEM) (Moss-Racusin et. al., 2018). Looking at all the research on gender-based bias in higher education, it is clear that women are viewed as inferior to men when it comes to their academic ability and this stereotype is upheld by faculty who are unwilling to address their own internal gender biases.

### **Student Sense of Belonging**

Previously, it was mentioned how faculties' use of bias, stereotypes, and microaggressions toward students of color impact a student's academic performance and ability to succeed. In order to clearly understand the impact of bias in higher education, we need to look at the student sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is typically described as a student's ability to feel validated, seen, and understood within their classrooms and campus community. In a study that looked at the sense of belonging of Black, LatinX, Asian, and multiracial students, researchers found that these populations felt "intellectually inferior" in common university spaces such as classrooms, laboratories, and in professors' offices (Lewis, et. al. 2021). In this study, this feeling of inferiority between their classmates and professors made some students of color feel like they might need to leave the university.

In addition, the research done by Lewis and colleagues (2021), identified that students of color also felt a lack of empathy from their professors and fellow students. Some Black students expressed that White student in their classes had a lack of exposure to students of color and lived experiences with racism, bias, and discrimination. And their professors struggled to address this lack of empathy and awareness of systemic racial issues. This left students of color feeling uncomfortable or “singled out” in their classrooms because of their experiences. Ultimately, students of color and their sense of belonging to the university was strongly correlated to the amount of racially targeted biases, like microaggressions by faculty and their peers. There is a disconnect between faculties' education on systemic issues of racism and how to address their own biases and the biases of their students within the classroom. College faculty have a responsibility to all students to create brave spaces for learning and expression and they cannot achieve this if they don't start addressing their own internalized biases.

### **Summary**

All of the research in this section of the project clearly shows that bias is a huge problem within higher education. With research indicating that the majority of students experience bias within the classroom, and this bias is felt unevenly more by underrepresented populations of students. Also, with the student population continuing to grow in diversity, with an increase of enrollment from students with different nationalities/ethnicities, classes, and races, as well as an increase in students enrolling with an identity in the LGBTQ+ community (Patten et al., 2016). The overwhelming majority of faculty are white, male, and cisgendered (NCES, 2020). And with most institutions being PWI's it makes sense that faculty report feeling underprepared when asked to address important issues with students like race, racism, sexism, and homophobia. And because of this lack of knowledge and preparedness, students are more likely to experience bias



which directly impacts their ability to be successful. Lewis and colleagues (2021) saw that the majority of students who experience bias are students of color and this bias is present in the form of microaggressions and stereotypes. Lastly, in a study that examined how often professors can identify incidents of bias versus students who saw or experienced bias in their classroom, students identified bias almost 35% more than their professors (Boysen et al., 2009). It is clear that faculty don't receive the proper training to address issues of bias, and this is felt strongly by the students taking their classes.

### **Conclusion**

College faculty undergo a variety of educational programs and training. Yet, most faculty feel underprepared to address serious systemic issues that students are facing. Using R-MMDI, instances of bias and prejudice directly impact how students make sense of their college experiences and influence their ability to be successful. This is true especially for students from underrepresented populations. After examining the literature, it can be concluded that, while students grow in diversity, college faculty remain majority white, male, and cis-gendered. College faculty who have no targeted training in addressing their unconscious biases are more likely to uphold institutional ideologies of racism and sexism. This leads to students to feel unsupported, marginalized, and oppressed. Additionally, the research indicates that bias from college faculty is directly related to academic success and retention. It also impacts a student's sense of belonging, causing students to feel disconnected from the campus community. From this analysis, it is clear that bias within university faculty needs to be addressed. While unconscious bias is unintentional, it is important to bring awareness to this issue and to develop training for faculty that allows them to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for their students.

## Chapter 3: Project Description

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, we looked at unconscious bias utilizing the theory of the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. After reviewing the literature, it is clear faculty don't receive proper training on how to avoid bias in their classroom and this impacts students' success and their overall wellbeing. With the diversity in the undergraduate student population growing, there needs to be an increase in faculty education on bias and how to create a more inclusive environment for students. Specifically, faculty need to be educated on how to break their unconscious bias when it comes to systemic issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Past DEI initiatives and workshops to educate college faculty on these systemic issues and bias are outdated and often ineffective. A more efficient, intentional, and evidence based workshop needs to be developed to address this culture of bias in higher education. My suggestion is to implement a workshop that intentionally treats bias and other forms of prejudice as a habit that can be broken through active awareness and motivation (Forcher, et. al. 2017). According to William Cox, whose bias habit-breaking has inspired me to develop this workshop for college faculty, his workshop has shown to have "long-term change in key outcomes related to intergroup bias, including increases in awareness, concern about discrimination, and, in one study, long-term decreases in implicit bias" (Forscher et. al. 2017). Hopefully, my workshop will have the same impact on faculty and increase their awareness of their own unconscious biases and empower them to change their behavior so that they can create a more inclusive environment for their students. This chapter will discuss the layout and learning outcomes of implementing a two-hour intentional bias workshop that is required for all college faculty and how this workshop can hopefully change the culture of bias within the classroom.

## Project Components

From the perspectives gathered in chapter two, the best way to address faculty being influenced by their unconscious biases when working with underrepresented populations of students, is through a required training for faculty where they are made aware of the multiple identities of students through viewing students through the lens of R-MMDI theory. In addition, the workshop will assist faculty in becoming aware of their own internal biases and how to address them in the classroom. The overall goal of this workshop is to create more awareness of systemic issues facing students within higher education and to empower college professors to promote equity and inclusion within their classroom.

Training college faculty on unconscious bias is a relatively new approach in combating various forms of prejudice. From what I have seen in the research, most colleges and universities utilize DEI training and workshops where they discuss the steps that they are taking in making their institution more inclusive and diverse. Now, it isn't my argument that DEI training isn't effective or important within higher education. However, research indicates that these training programs involve simply discussing issues of bias, discrimination, and prejudice (Cox, 2022). The training itself does not show participants how to address their own unconscious biases, it doesn't address where bias comes from, and how to create long lasting change within your institution. According to Cox (2022), "the evidence indicates that the bias habit-breaking training is effective at empowering individuals as agents of change to reduce bias, create inclusion, and promote equity, both within themselves and the social contexts they inhabit" (pg. 2). Taking this into consideration, there will be incredible value in implementing intentional bias training for college faculty that specifically focuses on the identities of students

that they serve and how they can be better equipped to facilitate discussions of race, racism, sexism, and homophobia within their classroom.

In my two-hour workshop for faculty, we will begin by discussing the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes & Jones, 2007). Utilizing the framework of this theory will help college faculty understand the multiple identities of students and how these identities interact with each other helping students make meaning out of their environments. In chapter one, I described the inner workings of this theory and how it impacts student development. In the workshop, I will use the model of R - MMDI that was developed by Abes et. al. (2007) where they first utilized the meaning making filter.

Now, in the workshop, it will be described that a student's identity development is represented by the multiple intersecting rings, displayed in the upper right corner of the model in the Abes et al. (2007) article. In addition, there are intersecting rings that represent the socially constructed identities of students such as race, sexual orientation, gender, or social class. At the core of the rings is a student's sense of self, which can be represented by their lived experiences (Abes et al. 2007). In the workshop, it will be important for faculty to understand that one aspect, like ethnicity, which is an important aspect of a student's identity cannot be understood without also taking into account all other parts of their identity, like their sexuality. Essentially, the context or experiences that students have had and their own socially constructed identities play a huge role into not only who they are, but how they take in information. Faculty need to be aware of this because as mentioned in chapter two, the college student population is growing in diversity, while the majority of college professors are white and cisgendered. So, college faculty will engage with many students from different socioeconomic groups, ethnicities/nationalities, genders, and sexual orientations. And these groups of students are going to have different

perspectives, triggers, needs, and lived experiences than their peers. Hence, this workshop will help professors become aware, knowledgeable, and intentional in their understanding of student identity development and how they can create brave spaces, free of bias, for students to engage and be successful.

The next part of the workshop will discuss this meaning making filter as a part of the student development process. In chapter one, I explained the purpose of this filter and how students' contextual influences (i.e., friends, family, stereotypes, societal pressures) all play a role in how people make sense of themselves and their experiences. This aspect of R - MMDI is important for faculty to understand because the previous research indicated that students identify significantly more instances of bias than faculty observe. So, this portion of the workshop will show faculty that even the smallest (most likely unconscious) instance of bias is detectable and seen by students, especially students from underrepresented populations. Some examples of unconscious bias that faculty may not see in their classroom are: having a text in their curriculum that was written by someone who is overtly racist/homophobic, using deficit language when discussing issues race, gender, or ethnicity, not addressing incidents of bias or prejudice that occur on behalf of students in their class, making the assumption that all of their students first language is English, assuming that all their students are abled bodied, etc. All of these examples could simply be issues that faculty have never been prompted to address before. Yet, even if these incidents are unintentional or if they seem small to faculty, they can impact students' sense of belonging and their ability to be successful. For instance, when a professor splits students into discussion groups and they specifically place all of the students of color in a group together or all of the international students together. This creates tension for these groups of students because they would start to believe that they can only take up space in a place or share their ideas among

other students who look like them. My point here is that no matter how small or unintentional the incident of bias is, students make meaning out of the actions or assignments from their professors and this impacts their ability to engage with the course content and their ability to feel safe in the classroom.

Therefore, this workshop should challenge faculty to think critically about students' access to information and it should bring awareness to systemic issues facing certain populations of students. In addition, this workshop should motivate faculty to re-evaluate their course content for outdated or problematic content that could trigger or elicit strong reactions from students. Unless, of course, faculty want to challenge their students by presenting a systemic issue and facilitating a discussion surrounding this topic. This brings me to the final part of the workshop, where I will identify strategies for faculty to have these challenging conversations surrounding issues of race, racism, sexism, sexuality, or sexual orientation. The goal of this is so faculty can confront their own unconscious biases and empower students to do the same.

### **Project Evaluation**

To evaluate the effectiveness of this training program for faculty to reduce the use of bias, I will administer a pre and post test to understand faculty's perception of student identities and bias before participating in the workshop and after. Upon completing the bias workshop faculty should have conversations with their colleagues to address possible issues of bias that they've seen happen in the past and outline a strategy on how to avoid those incidents in the future. Additionally, when issues of bias do happen faculty should be held accountable by department heads and by the university. Hopefully, bringing student identity development and the impact of bias on student success will motivate faculty to reflect on ways that they can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for their students. Also, faculty should feel

empowered to engage with their students, especially those who identify within the underrepresented population, so that they can increase these students' sense of belonging. Utilizing the tools and strategies from the bias workshop is going to be a continuous process that requires engagement, awareness, and motivation to create positive change. Ongoing assessment and evaluation of faculty reducing bias and their knowledge of systemic issues within higher education should be required.

For the workshop, to account for faculty's previous knowledge of student identity development and their understanding of bias, a survey will be administered before and after the workshop. The survey will be designed using a 1 - 5 Likert Scale made up of statements that they will be asked to rate on what degree they disagree or agree with. These surveys will be developed through using the book *Assessment in student affairs* by John Schuh, Patrick Biddix, Laura Dean, and Jillian Kinzie (2016). In this text, surveys are an important tool for assessment in higher education because a survey can "directly align with project goals, outcomes, and analytical techniques" (p. 154). Also, it is important that the questions asked in a survey align well with what you want to measure or potentially improve by implementing a workshop or training (Schuh et al., 2016). The specific questions will be categorized by faculty's understanding of unconscious bias, knowledge of student development (R - MMIDI), and the perspectives on equity and inclusion in the classroom. Ideally, upon completing the workshop faculty will have a better understanding of student development, how bias impacts their success, and they will have more knowledge on how to address incidents of bias in the classroom.

### **Project Conclusions**

The problem addressed in the beginning of this project was that faculty in higher education are plagued with bias. Professors are not being effectively educated regarding issues

of racism, sexism, and sexual orientation on college campuses. And as a result, faculty often reinforce the use of stereotypes, microaggressions, and other forms of prejudice in their classrooms and curriculums. According to the research, this lack of training has contributed to a decrease in students' sense of belonging and their ability to be successful. College faculty need to be educated about the identity development of students and how the actions of faculty can directly impact students' development. To better understand what types of training or workshops faculty go through before they assume their roles as professors, we looked at the type of educational courses that they take. Most of these courses describe having conversations about race and racism within the classroom as uncomfortable and/or challenging. The future educators in these courses indicated that they didn't feel that these courses prepared to teach about these issues of race and racism, and it also didn't prepare them to challenge their own internal biases and use of stereotypes within their own lives.

Moreover, the use of DEI workshops has been used to actively address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion at universities. While these workshops are effective in initiating discussions regarding systemic issues that higher education institutions are facing, it does not empower faculty to actively change their beliefs and practices. To combat these issues a newer, more intentional bias training that acknowledges the needs of underrepresented populations of students and provides strategies for bias intervention to promote equity and inclusion in the classroom. The bias training will educate faculty on R - MMDI and how bias impacts students' achievement, it will identify strategies to avoid and challenge unconscious bias in your everyday life. Requiring this training for faculty will increase their awareness of systemic issues facing students and increase students' sense of belonging and their ability to be successful.

### **Implementation**



Looking at the research gathered in the literature review, there are some limitations that could be explored. Bias training has not been exclusively used within higher education, a lot of the research and data gathering regarding the impact of bias training interventions has happened within large organizations, corporations, and businesses. Therefore, because of the prevalence of bias and systemic issues within higher education, this training should be researched more at universities and colleges. In addition, more research should be done on the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion training of college faculty. Also, this research should include faculty's attitudes towards these types of training and how effective it is at changing faculty's perceptions of bias.

In order to implement this research and training within higher education, it is important to identify key stakeholders and community campus members who will be involved. For most universities, they have a designated learning center for faculty. This is typically where they provide resources for new faculty, host events/orientations, and where they have specific workshops for faculty that they can choose to attend. For this training to be successful, it would require active participation from university faculty, which is why this specific training should be a requirement for new and experienced professors.

After completion of the training, is when faculty will complete the post survey so that I can evaluate their understanding of student identity development and how unconscious bias can impact student learning and sense of belonging. Ideally, the workshop will leave faculty feeling empowered and they will have a greater awareness of systemic issues facing students and have the motivation to promote equity and inclusion within the greater campus community. While this may be a difficult training to enforce, it is necessary to evaluate faculty training on bias and how they could be unintentionally reinforcing systemic issues within higher education that are

directly impacting the students they serve. Hopefully, this training will help faculty create safer spaces for student engagement and academic success.

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## Appendix A

### Questions for Pre/Post - Assessment

Rank the level you agree with the following statements from 1 - 5 (1 =disagree, 2 = mostly disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = mostly agree, 5 agree). Please

#### Unconscious Bias

1. As a faculty member I have a strong understanding of what unconscious bias is.
2. I am aware of how bias impacts my student's ability to learn and be successful in my class.
3. I believe bias training to be important and valuable for college faculty.

#### Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

1. I know what R - MMDI is and feel confident in helping students make meaning out of their identity development..
2. I have knowledge about student identity development and how to effectively support students from different backgrounds and ethnicities.
3. When I assign a reading about race or racism, I feel comfortable in facilitating a dialogue.

#### Creating Equitable and Inclusive Environments

1. I feel confident in my ability to address an incident of bias or prejudice within my classroom.
2. As a faculty member, I believe creating equitable and inclusive environments for underrepresented populations of students is important.
3. I know how bias can impact my students success, so I do my best to have a bias free classroom.