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Ethical Deception: Student Perceptions of Diversity in College Recruitment Materials

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ABSTRACT

The use of images of students from traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds in college recruitment materials presents a seemingly difficult dilemma. Should colleges and universities use diversity in recruitment materials to try and attract students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds even if those images do not accurately represent the amount of diversity at the university? To discover student perceptions relating to this question, I used a mixed-methods approach in which I surveyed 117 students and then interviewed 10 survey participants. Survey and interview questions were based on utilitarian versus deontological ethics with an emphasis on whether exaggerating diversity in recruitment materials is ethl. The results of this exploratory study showed that most students believe using a disproportionate amount of diversity in recruitment materials is unethical. Student participants who identified as a person from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group indicated that it is unethical to exaggerate diversity in recruitment materials at a higher percentage than their white counterparts. This is likely because people from underrepresented backgrounds face a much higher risk of harm from misleading recruitment materials than their white peers.

CCS Concepts

Social and professional topics → User characteristics → Race and ethnicity

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Keywords

Higher education, Recruitment, Race, Document design

INTRODUCTION

When interviewing a technical communication (TC) student for a recent research project, she relayed to me her experience choosing the college where she wanted to study. She said, “Many [universities] put diversity and pictures of people of color on their recruitment materials. I don’t want to be the Asian face. Those posters are a lie. It’s false advertising. It really bothers me. I was there. I was that person.” In today’s higher education culture, a diverse student body can be a form of prestige. The most diverse campuses are ranked by US News and World Report in a similar way to how top academic programs are ranked. When administrators seek to recruit a diverse class of students because of their institution’s “core values” or mission statement, they may be creating opportunities for students who might have otherwise struggled to find a place at their institution. However, diversity efforts enacted by colleges and universities for prestige and recognition—or those that are enacted simply to fulfill a mandate—can be dehumanizing to vulnerable populations such as students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC).

College recruitment materials are a form of TC in which information about a college or university is presented to a prospective student in an effort to convince that student to attend the institution. In previous studies, I have explored how TC students, especially students who identify as a person of color, discover technical communication academic programs (Dayley & Walton, 2018) and how they perceive their program’s support for students from diverse backgrounds (Dayley, 2020). Other researchers have explored the disparities in the representation of people of color specifically in college recruitment brochures (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Hite & Yearwood, 2001; Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013), as well as ethical document design (Dragga, 1996; Manning & Amare, 2006). In this exploratory study, I examine how program administrators seek to recruit students from diverse backgrounds by examining the ethics of the type of communication used to create

college recruitment brochures. Specifically, I explore the question of whether it is ethical to use deceptive numbers of non-white students in recruitment brochures to entice people of color to enroll at an institution of higher education. The word “deceptive” is used intentionally here and throughout the article. This is because the use of exaggerated representation of BIPOC in college recruitment materials is likely meant to intentionally deceive readers into believing the college/university is more diverse than it actually is (Osei-Kofi, Torres, & Lui, 2013; Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013). Using another word, such as “inaccurate” for example, would connote that the use of exaggerated numbers of BIPOC in recruitment materials was simply a mistake or was not intended to purposefully deceive the audience. As will be discussed later in this article, inaccurate representation in college recruitment materials is seen as deceptive and unethical by the participants of this study.

To explore the ethics of the techniques used in the design of college recruitment brochures, I employ traditional ethical frameworks, specifically deontological and utilitarian ethics. I use these frameworks to explore several ideas related to the design of recruitment brochures such as whether document designers are using people of color as merely a means to increase diversity numbers or whether attracting students of color under false pretenses is justified based on the benefit these students may receive from getting a college degree.

Unlike previous studies on diversity in college recruitment materials which analyze the images themselves, this article asks students directly about their opinions relating to the use of images of people from underrepresented groups in recruitment materials. Similar to Dragga’s 1996 study on ethical document design, I used survey questions to ask research participants about their perception of the ethics used in creating college recruitment materials. I then followed up with qualitative interviews with a subset of respondents to find out what their opinion is of the techniques used by colleges and universities in recruitment materials and their reasons behind those opinions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I discuss the literature that has previously explored the use of racial and ethnic diversity in college recruitment materials. I then use utilitarian and deontological framing to describe the ethical dilemma of using diversity in college recruitment materials.

Diversity in College Recruitment Materials

Higher education existed in the Americas well before the founding of the United States as an independent nation. As societal norms and attitudes have shifted over the nearly 400-year-old history of higher education in the Americas, institutions of higher education have transformed their admission policies from overt exclusion of people of color to a concerted effort to appear as inclusive as possible (Karabel, 2005; Lucas, 2016; Thelin, 2011). These efforts to diversify higher education often include the creation of recruitment materials that feature images of racially and ethnically diverse groups of students (Osei-Kofi, Torres, & Lui, 2013; Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013).

Several researchers have explored the way colleges and universities use diversity in their recruitment materials. Pippert, Essenburg, and Matchett (2013) examined 10,000 photographs found in college admission brochures for accuracy in representing the student body of the college who produced the brochures. Their findings showed that the majority of institutions in their study used images

of diversity in proportions that were significantly different from the actual student body. They stated that this type of inaccuracy is done purposefully by institutions of higher education to present a favorable image of the college:

We are, however, suggesting that the consistency at which institutions of higher education presented misleading depictions of racial diversity leads us to the understanding that it is intentional and near universal. It is clear that racial diversity is being used as a commodity in the marketing of higher education and presenting an image of diversity is more important than accurately portraying the student body. (Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013, p. 275)

The study also found that, more than any other group, the number of black students at colleges and universities was greatly exaggerated in recruitment materials. This suggests that colleges are not simply trying to appear welcoming to all groups but are trying to create an image of diversity even if that diversity is hyperbolic:

If appearing welcoming to all students or simply aspiring to be more diverse without constraining the definition of diversity was the true goal, the race-specific patterns in the data would not have surfaced. A simple exaggeration of racial diversity in admissions brochures would have resulted in greater representations of Hispanic and Native American students. In this study, Hispanics were consistently underrepresented across the institutions and images of Native American students were non-existent in most brochures. Furthermore, if appearing welcoming was the real goal, the shifting levels of over and underrepresentation of specific groups would not have been so dramatic when comparing campuses with different levels of diversity. (Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013, p. 276)

In their analysis of college admission viewbooks, Osei-Kofi, Torres, and Lui (2013) found that, regardless of the level of diversity at the institution, the level of diversity in college viewbooks remained the same. They report that representations of diversity in college recruitment materials appear not to convey a message of welcome and acceptance to people of color but are instead performative and meant for a white audience:

In the quest to appear diverse, bodies of color are positioned against a White norm and are used in viewbooks to invoke racial harmony on college campuses. In so doing, viewbook discourse attempts to play to liberal desires, wishes, and fantasies of racial harmony with a message that by attending an institution of higher education, you too can be a part of a racially harmonious community. (Osei-Kofi, Torres, & Lui, 2013, p. 402)

However, some researchers have noted that people of color may pay more attention to advertising that portrays images that are more racially diverse (Avery, 2003; Walker, Feild, Bernerth, & Becton, 2012). This indicates that although colleges and universities may be creating recruitment materials with diverse images more for perception than to attract people of color to their institutions, they may be attracting people of color anyway. Aléman and Salkever (2001) noted: “Much like advertisers might pitch a product by highlighting its most marketable trait (e.g., ‘lite,’ ‘non-fat’), these

colleges used ‘diversity’ as a means to attract the consumer to what they perceive is a desirable educational condition: the presence of racial and ethnic minority students” (p. 119).

The use of images of students from diverse backgrounds to try to bring in diverse classes of students, and appear supportive of diversity, creates a difficult dilemma for colleges and universities—a sort of chicken-or-egg scenario. If a college isn’t currently diverse, how can they attract diverse students to their campus without showing they are supportive of diversity by featuring people from diverse backgrounds in their recruitment materials? And if they do use images of people from diverse backgrounds in their recruitment materials, are they justified in exaggerating the diversity in these recruitment materials, knowing these images don’t accurately reflect the actual diversity on campus, to try and attract people from diverse backgrounds?

The Ethical Dilemma

To examine the ethical dilemma of whether colleges should use exaggerated numbers of students from diverse backgrounds in their recruitment materials, we will be looking at the problem through the lens of two major ethical frameworks, utilitarianism and deontology.

If we look at the problem of using diversity in college recruitment materials through the lens of utilitarianism, we ask ourselves “what action is likely to produce more good than any other action?” Though the issue of using exaggerated diversity in college recruitment materials is very complex, with many factors to consider, the simplest train of thought is that college generally leads to better life outcomes for students (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Bowman, Seifert, & Wolniak, 2016). Therefore, if you are concerned with increasing the quality of life for marginalized people, you will want to get as many of them enrolled in college as possible even if it means using deceptive recruitment materials to do so. Some will end up dropping out, but more will end up graduating, and most of those who graduate will be happier overall because of it.

In contrast to the “ends justify the means” philosophy of utilitarianism, deontologists believe that actions need to be justified and not merely “explain the factors that led us to choose them” (Markel, 2001, p. 46). In his much-cited article, “The ethic of expediency,” Katz conducts a rhetorical analysis on a memo from Nazi Germany (1992). He finds that the “memo is *too* technical, *too* logical [and that] [t]he writer shows no concern that the purpose of his memo is . . . to exterminate people” (p. 257, emphasis in original). Katz goes on to explain this rhetorical problem, the ethic of expediency, as a problem of the author using a rhetorical style that shows no regard for the contents or consequences of the writing. Katz argues that “we need to consider technical writing based on deliberative rhetoric from the standpoint of both rhetoric and ethics” (p. 260). In the article, Katz points out that “...the technology and the technical communications about the technology were effective and expedient but also appallingly unethical” (Dombrowski, 2000, p. 53).

For Katz, and other deontologists, the design of communication has ethical implications. Using images of people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds on recruitment materials when they do not accurately represent the diversity at that institution may attract people from diverse backgrounds to attend an institution, but this is deceptive. The act of using deception to increase diversity at an institution, even if the intent is to better the lives of the people

who attend the institution, to a deontologist, would be considered immoral and therefore unethical.

As discussed earlier, previous literature has shown that the attempt by colleges and universities to use diverse images in their recruitment materials is largely performative and meant to present an image of diversity and inclusion to the public rather than to be welcoming to BIPOC. However, these materials may still be attracting BIPOC to colleges and universities. Even if we assume that colleges and universities are using deceptive numbers of students from racially and ethnically backgrounds in their recruitment materials with the best of intentions, this practice is still deceptive and may even be harmful. When making decisions about recruiting students from underrepresented backgrounds, it is important to include the voices of students from those backgrounds (Dayley, 2021). This article seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding the use of BIPOC in college recruitment materials by seeking input directly from students about the consequences of using hyperbolic representations of diversity in the design of recruitment materials.

METHODS

Since the effect of using inaccurate depictions of diversity in recruitment materials has not been studied in-depth, this project is designed as an exploratory study. The intent of this study is to better understand and clarify potential problems related to the use of diversity in college recruitment materials. The results described later in the manuscript are meant to inform future research projects.

The following section describes the research methods used for both the survey and interview portions of the study. Each section is broken down into a separate subsection for the survey and interview portions of the study.

Recruitment

This IRB approved study (Texas State University #7302) was limited to students at Texas State University not currently enrolled in the technical communication program. To recruit participants, I contacted each department at the university and asked them to invite their students to complete the survey. This resulted in 117 responses. Upon completion of the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview. Those who indicated they would be willing to be interviewed were directed to a separate survey that collected their first name and email address. Sixteen participants indicated they would be willing to participate in an interview. I contacted all 16 through email. Of those 16, 10 responded to my email and were interviewed.

Participants

This section describes the demographics of the participants in the study. All interview participants were volunteers selected from survey participants.

Survey Participants

A total of 117 students answered at least 1 survey question. Not all participants answered every question. There were 65 participants who indicated they were undergraduate students and 48 who indicated they were graduate students. Of the respondents who identified their gender identity, 66 identified as women, 23 identified as men, and 2 identified as non-binary. When asked about their racial/ethnic identity, 6 students identified as Native American, 3 students identified as Asian, 3 students identified as Black, 39 students identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 58 students

identified as white, and 5 students identified as another identity not listed in the survey.

Interview Participants

There were 10 students who agreed to be interviewed for this article. All interview participants were current college students at Texas State University. The interviews took place over the phone or on Zoom. Each interview participant is represented by a pseudonym. The terms used to identify the students' racial and ethnic backgrounds were given by participants. Interview participants included:

- **Adam – An African American and white man**
- **Angie - A white woman**
- **Jason – A Chinese and white man**
- **John - A Latino man**
- **Laurie – A white woman**
- **Leigh - A white woman**
- **Marie - A white woman**
- **Markus - A Latino man**
- **Ransom - A white man**
- **Suzanne - A Latina woman**

Data Collection

Survey

In order to discover students' perceptions regarding the use of images depicting people from diverse backgrounds in recruitment materials, I created an online survey that could be easily distributed.

The survey was created in *Qualtrics*, an online survey generator and data collector. The survey contained 25 questions and could be completed in approximately 10 minutes.

I created a list of all university departments and contact information for department chairs. In the rare case that contact information for a department chair could not be found, I contacted the administrative assistant or the general email address for the department. I emailed each department and asked them to invite their students to take the survey. Department contacts emailed students the provided invite letter along with a link to the survey. Survey data collection lasted for nine weeks. After nine weeks, the survey was closed.

Interviews

Participants were asked a set of questions focusing on several factors including the type of recruitment materials they viewed when making their college decision, how they made their college decision, and the importance of diversity in their college decision. After asking about their own college decision, I used a list of interview questions based on the survey results to ask their opinion regarding the use in college recruitment materials of images of people from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Interviews were conducted over the phone and on Zoom. The audio was recorded with permission. After recording the interviews, I created a transcription of each interview in a Word document.

Data Analysis

Survey

After 9 weeks, the survey was closed, having collected responses from a total of 117 students, with 91 completing the survey for a 78% completion rate. Reports to separate the results were created based on independent variables such as race/ethnicity, gender identity, age, and degree level. Data from each set of independent

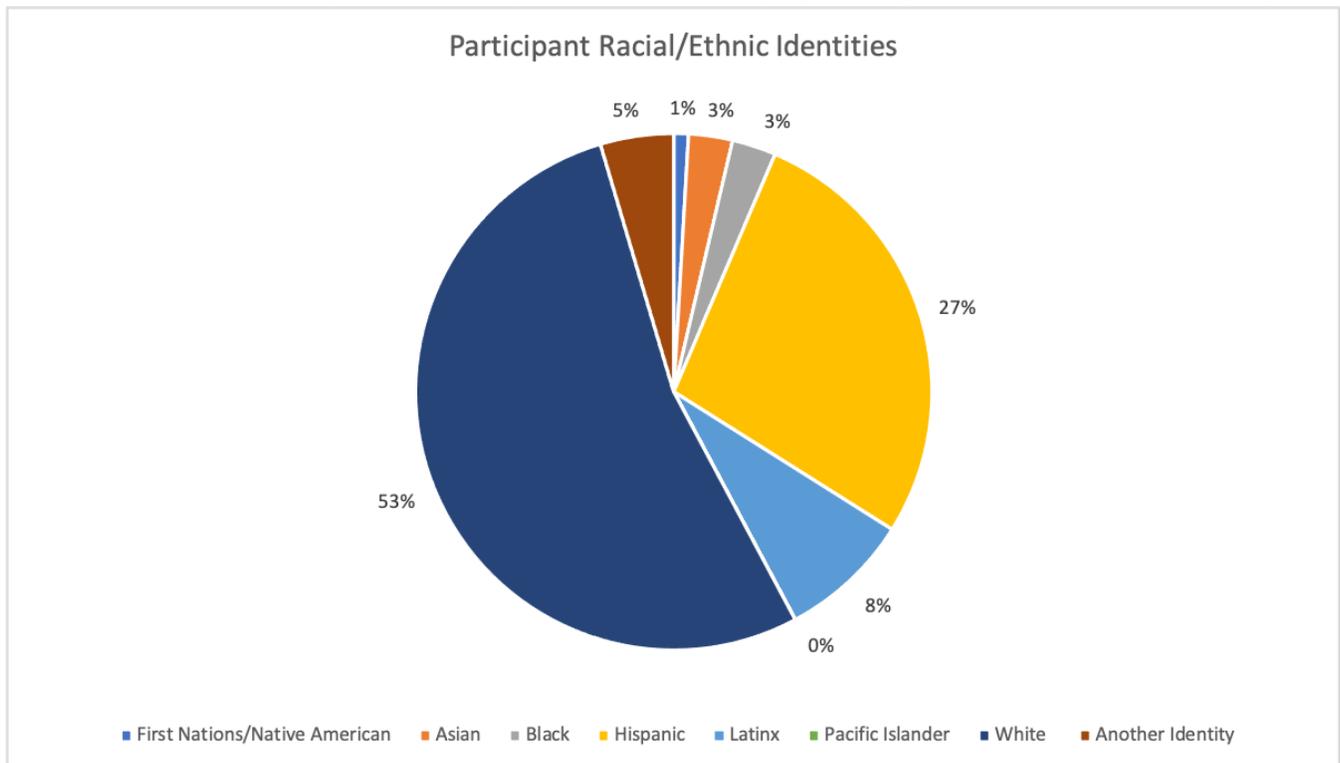


Figure 1. Pie chart displaying the percentage of respondents who identified as being a part of a specific racial and/or ethnic group.

Should colleges and universities actively try to recruit people from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds?

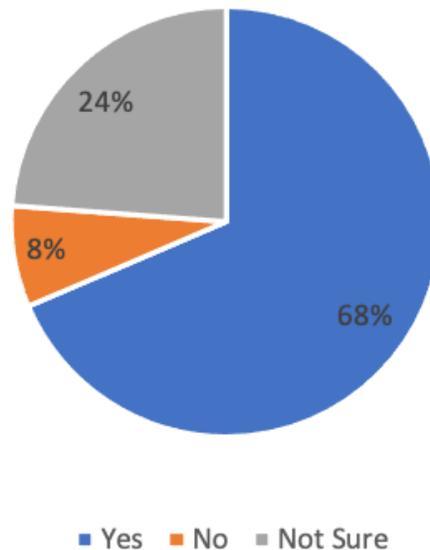


Figure 2. Pie chart displaying the percentage of respondents who believe, or don't believe that colleges and universities should try to actively recruit students from underrepresented racial and/or ethnic backgrounds.

variables was placed in a frequency distribution table as part of a univariate analysis. Distribution data was compared and analyzed for differences among variables.

Interviews

I sent each interview participant a document containing their transcribed interview over email. I asked each participant to read over the transcription and notify me of any changes that needed to be made. This was done to ensure the integrity of the data and to make sure that interview participants were being represented correctly.

As suggested by Crabtree and Miller, I used a spectrum of "prefigured" and "emergent" codes to analyze the data for emerging themes (1992, p. 151). The prefigured codes were based on the interview questions and emergent codes developed as the data in each prefigured code was analyzed. Each interview question, or a small group of interview questions, represented a prefigured code.

I carefully read each transcription in a Word document and highlighted the participants' answers to each interview question. After doing this, I created a comment in the document which summarized each highlighted quotation in a few words. After creating short summaries for each highlighted answer, I then grouped the answers to each interview question according to emerging themes based on my short summaries.

When quoting interview participants in the article, I used exact quotations leaving in slang, alternative grammar usage, etc.

However, if an interview participant used "filler words" excessively such as "um," "like," or "you know," I removed those words. This was meant to allow the words of participants to be understood clearly (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

RESULTS

Survey

In this section I report on the answers given by survey participants. I have divided the data into three categories:

- responses by students who identified as only white;
- responses by students who identified as a person of color; and
- the total combined responses.

I compared the white student group with the BIPOC group to see if there were any major differences in the opinions regarding how diversity is used in recruitment materials of the BIPOC group versus the group of white students. It should be noted that the BIPOC group is not monolithic and neither the group as a whole nor individuals in that group stand in as representatives of the groups with which they identify. I combined all non-white students into the BIPOC group to give more data for comparison as any one non-white racial and ethnic group was very small, which made them difficult to compare to the white student group.

Survey respondents included 65 undergraduate and 48 graduate students. Of the respondents who reported their gender identity, 66

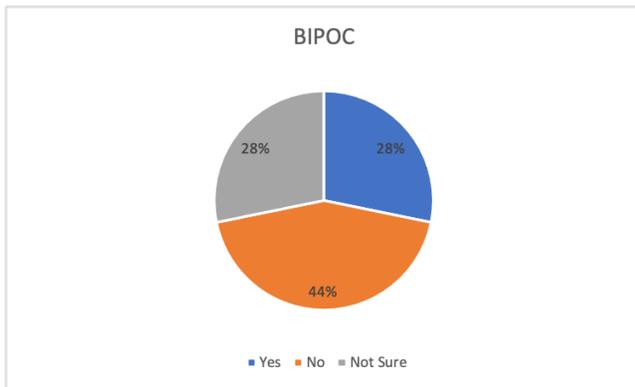


Figure 3. Pie chart displaying the percentage of BIPOC respondents indicating whether or not they believe it is good for colleges and universities to try and recruit students from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds by showing diversity on their recruitment materials, even if the school isn't actually diverse, since attending college will likely result in a better life for most graduates.

identified as female, 23 identified as male, and 2 identified as non-binary. The racial/ethnic identities of respondents included: white (58), Hispanic (30), Latinx (9), Asian (3), Black (3), First Nations/ Native American (1), and 5 respondents indicated another racial/ethnic identity not included in the question.

Survey participants were asked, "Should colleges and universities actively try to recruit people from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds?" This question was asked before any other questions regarding race/ethnicity in the survey. The purpose of this question was to see which kind of bias may be present in the opinions of survey respondents either for or against the intentional recruitment of students from underrepresented backgrounds. The majority of respondents indicated that colleges should actively recruit students from diverse backgrounds (68%) with only 8% of respondents indicating that colleges should not actively recruit people from diverse backgrounds and 24% indicating that they were not sure.

Students were shown a series of images as samples of college recruitment materials. They were then asked four questions regarding their opinions of the use of images of students from diverse backgrounds in recruitment materials. The first question was meant to ask students about the dilemma of whether it is morally acceptable to use these images within a utilitarian framework. The question read:

Academic studies show that, in most cases, attending college will result in more money earned over time and better life satisfaction for graduates.

A common goal of colleges and universities is to increase the diversity of their student body.

Although some colleges and universities have a student population with many students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, most are predominately white.

Is it good for colleges and universities to try and recruit students from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds by showing diversity on their recruitment materials, even if the school isn't actually diverse, since attending college will likely result in a better life for most graduates?

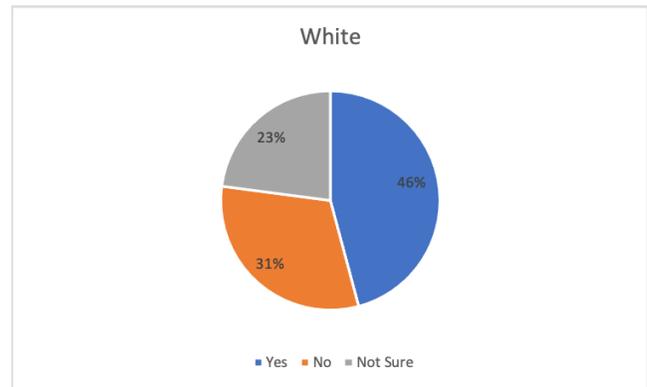


Figure 4. Pie chart displaying the percentage of white respondents indicating whether or not they believe it is good for colleges and universities to try and recruit students from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds by showing diversity on their recruitment materials, even if the school isn't actually diverse, since attending college will likely result in a better life for most graduates.

The second question was meant to look at the same situation within a deontological framework. The question was:

Many colleges and universities use images of diverse groups of students in their recruitment materials. These materials often misrepresent the amount of diversity at the institution. Should colleges and universities represent the amount of diversity at their institutions honestly in their recruitment materials even if it means the possibility of attracting fewer people from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds?

The majority of respondents answered that colleges and universities should accurately represent the diversity on their campuses in their recruitment materials (53%). When broken down by racial/ethnic groups, 44% of white respondents said that colleges should accurately represent their diversity in recruitment materials compared to 69% of people of color.

For the third question, students were given a statement and asked to select the reasons why the statement is true or to indicate that they did not agree with the statement. The statement said: "Colleges and universities should feature individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in their recruitment materials, even if it misrepresents the amount of diversity at their institution, because (click all that apply)." The choices they were given were:

- It shows the college supports diversity
- It could attract more students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Another reason (Respondents were then given a text box to state that reason)
- Colleges and universities should not exaggerate racial and ethnic diversity
- Don't know

Responses included 38% (35) indicating that featuring diverse individuals shows the college supports diversity (50% (24) white and 28% (11) BIPOC), 51% (47) selected "colleges and universities should not exaggerate racial and ethnic diversity" (46% (22) white

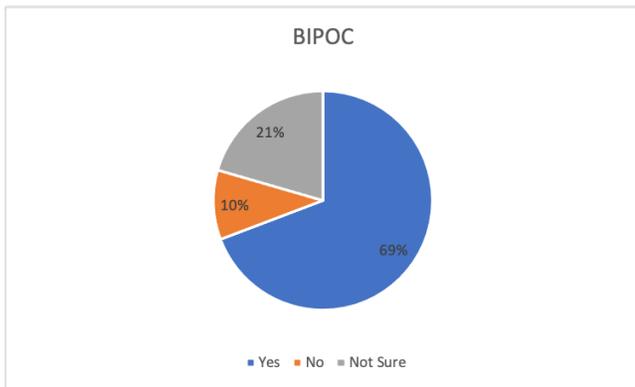


Figure 5. Pie chart displaying the percentage of BIPOC respondents indicating whether or not they believe colleges and universities should represent the amount of diversity at their institutions honestly in their recruitment materials even if it means the possibility of attracting fewer people from under-represented racial/ethnic backgrounds.

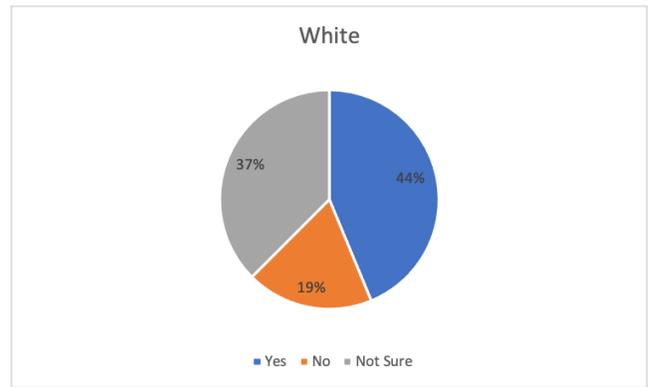


Figure 6. Pie chart displaying the percentage of white respondents indicating whether or not they believe colleges and universities should represent the amount of diversity at their institutions honestly in their recruitment materials even if it means the possibility of attracting fewer people from under-represented racial/ethnic backgrounds.

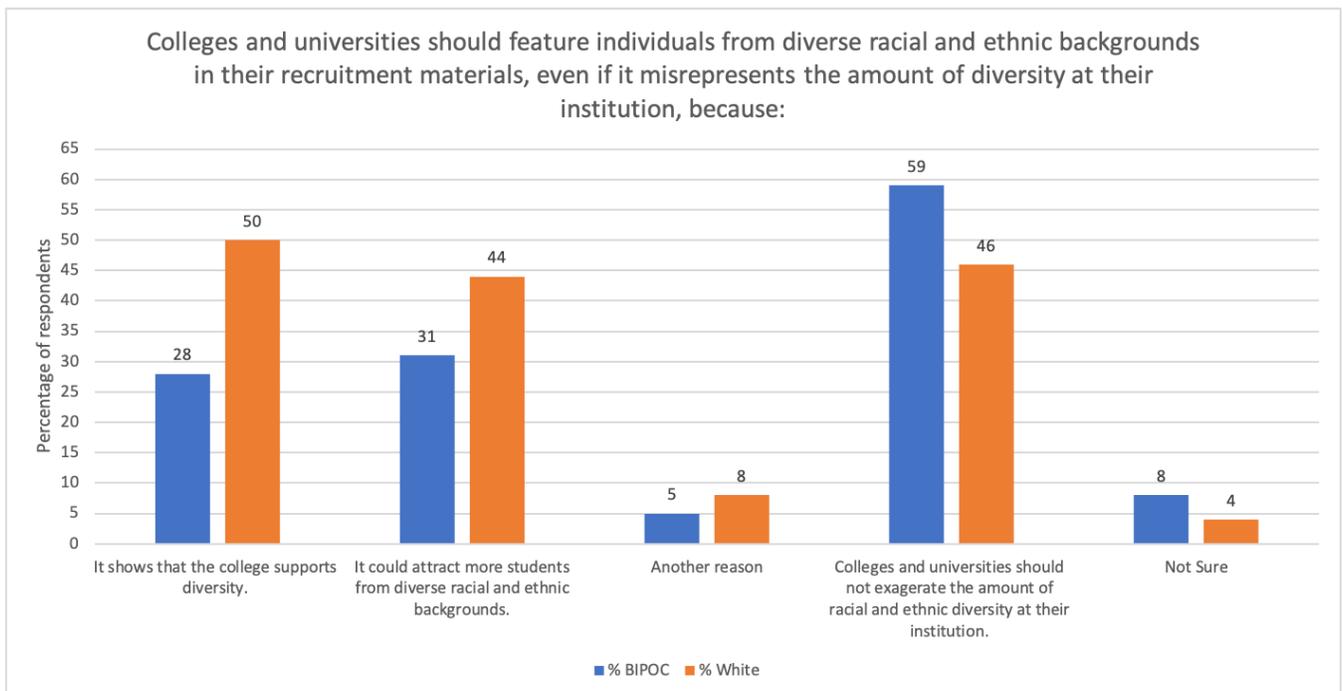


Figure 7. Bar graph displaying the percentage of BIPOC and white respondents who indicated agreement with several statements regarding why colleges and universities should feature images of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in their recruitment materials even if it misrepresents the amount of diversity at the institution. The X-axis shows the different possible answers respondents could have selected. The Y-axis indicates the percentage. Two bars are shown side by side for each possible answer showing the percentage of BIPOC respondents compared to the percentage of white respondents.

and 59% (23) BIPOC), and 36% (33) said that featuring diversity could attract more students from diverse backgrounds (44% (23) white, 31% (12) BIPOC).

The fourth question stated, “It is wrong for colleges and universities to misrepresent the amount of racial and ethnic diversity at their institution in their recruitment materials because (click all that apply).” Choices for this question included:

- the college/university is intentionally misleading students and the public.

- it is morally wrong for colleges and universities to misrepresent the amount of diversity at their institutions.
- misrepresenting the amount of racial/ethnic diversity in recruitment materials could harm people from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- Another reason (Respondents were then given a text box to state that reason)
- colleges and universities should be able to show a

disproportionate amount of diversity in recruitment materials if it means more people will benefit from higher education.

- Don't know

Fifty-six percent (48) of respondents indicated that colleges and universities should not mis-represent the amount of diversity at their institutions in recruitment materials because doing so is intentionally misleading: 49% (22) white, 67% (24) BIPOC), 60% (52) indicated misrepresentation could be harmful (69% (31) white, 56% (20) BIPOC), and 30% (26) of respondents indicated that misrepresenting diversity is morally wrong (22% (10) white, 44% (16) BIPOC). Twenty-one percent (18) of respondents indicated that colleges and universities should be allowed to exaggerate their diversity in recruitment materials with 33% (15) of white respondents selecting this response compared with only 6% (2) of the BIPOC respondents.

Interviews

As expected, interview responses were much more nuanced than the survey responses. Interview participants were asked if they believed it was OK for colleges and universities to exaggerate the amount of racial and ethnic diversity at their institutions if the purpose of doing so is to show support for diversity and to help the institution to attract more people from underrepresented backgrounds. All respondents, to some extent, indicated that it's not good for colleges and universities to misrepresent the amount of diversity at their institutions, but their reasons for this were varied.

Responses to this question fell into three main categories:

- diversity should not be the focus;
- communication should be accurate; and
- misrepresenting diversity is unethical.

Diversity Should Not be the Focus

Both Angie and Leigh stated that they believe that colleges and universities should not be focusing on diversity when recruiting students. For Angie and Leigh, the focus should be on the college and its program offerings rather than if the college has diverse groups of students. Angie said:

[The university should] want [prospective students] to feel like they open this pamphlet and that they aren't trying to get people there because they are of a certain race. You want people to go to your school because they want to be there. They like the campus. They like the education. They're going to be happy at that school because they like that school not because they like the fact that they saw other people like them. Diversity is important in the sense that we don't want anyone to feel left out but we also don't want to make it this "come here because we are diverse," we are this and we are that. They should want to come here because...this is where they're getting their education. [The university should] want [students] to come here because [we] have a good education. At least

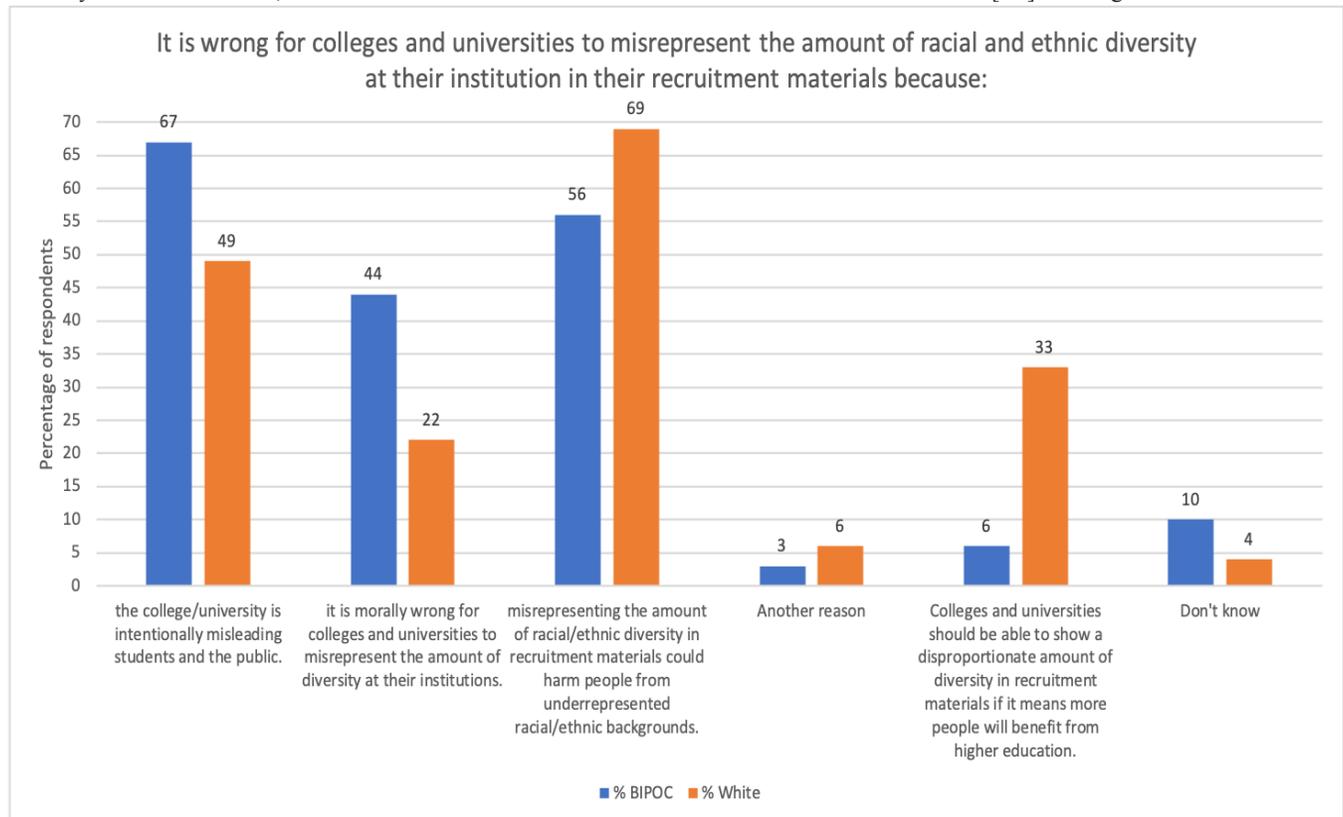


Figure 8. Bar graph displaying the percentage of BIPOC and white respondents who indicated agreement with several statements regarding why it is wrong for colleges and universities to misrepresent the amount of racial and ethnic diversity at their institution in their recruitment materials. The X-axis shows the different possible answers respondents could have selected. The Y-axis indicates the percentage. Two bars are shown side by side for each possible answer showing the percentage of BIPOC respondents compared to the percentage of white respondents.

that's how I feel as someone who's also an educator. I don't want to make it a big deal that my class is a certain percentage this or a certain percentage this. I don't want to make it about percentages...I want to make it about being a community and being a community doesn't mean that we're focusing on the individual people.

In her interview, Angie expressed concern that colleges may be focusing too much on the amount of diversity in recruitment materials in an effort to increase prestige. She expressed that diversity is important in that we don't want some students to feel left out but reiterated the importance of the college and degree program rather than focusing on certain groups of people.

For Leigh, focusing on diversity in recruitment is unimportant and may even be problematic:

You know to me [diversity in recruitment materials] doesn't matter to me. It's about the person. I think the person needs to be there it doesn't matter what color you are. To me, you know, if you're having to go out just because somebody's a certain color, whether they're white, black, you know, polka dots, that shouldn't matter. That's never mattered to me. It doesn't matter how old a person is. It doesn't, you know? In a way I think it's kind of wrong. Just because, you know, I mean I think it's okay to go out to different communities and say "hey, here we are," like any business you know, you want people to come, but just to say "well we're diverse because we have this kind of people" you know I think that would turn me away. I'd think well maybe I'm not the kind of person that they want here. Are they actually going to give me the kind of service that I want? Whether it's you know if I'm going to go in and get my hair cut if they say, "oh you you're not the right color" or "we have too many of your type here...so you don't count," you know that kind of stuff. I just really don't understand any of that.

In her interview, Leigh cited her rural background and talked about how her upbringing emphasized the person and not their racial or ethnic background. Leigh believes that, as a white person, having colleges and universities focus their recruitment efforts on BIPOC students sends a message that they don't want to support students like her.

Communication Should Be Accurate

Unlike Angie and Leigh, the rest of the interview participants indicated that they believe diversity is an important focus for colleges and universities. A common theme among interview participants was that colleges and universities should use images of people from diverse backgrounds in their materials, but those images should be accurate in representing campus demographics. Adam talked about his experiences with college recruitment materials when he was choosing a college. He said:

I kind of felt like it was a little bit of false advertisement. I'm fine with like if a university's being like really upfront or even if business is upfront. It's like "hey, we don't have a lot of diversity but we're trying." Like I'm fine with that but if I'm getting this false advertisement like "hey look we're so diverse" and then I show up and it's just like "no you're not really like what you showed me," then I don't really like that.

Like Adam, Marie believes that it's OK for colleges and universities to use diversity in their recruitment materials as long as they're upfront about the accuracy of those images:

If you're you know showing a place that is more diverse than it actually is, as long as it comes from a place of "we want to show you guys that we're supportive of having a diverse place here," then I think it's okay as long as there's at least some form of statistics somewhere so that they can see the actual diversity that they're going into. They're not like blindsided by "oh this place looks really diverse. I'm gonna go here" and then they show up and it's not at all.

Unlike Adam and Marie, who believe using images of people from diverse backgrounds is OK even if those images don't necessarily represent the institution accurately, as long as the institution is truthful about it, Ransom believes that if an institution does not have good representation on campus from specific groups, those groups should not be portrayed in recruitment materials. Ransom gave an example of how he might feel being a deaf student if the college he wanted to attend had misrepresented the number of disabled students on campus:

I wouldn't want a deaf student like me for example to read a pamphlet and see a school has that deaf people like me and then go and do a tour and say, "okay but I haven't seen any deaf people." I just go in...and then bam there's no deaf people like me. Then the whole thing was a lie to get me to go into college. It would sound more like a money grab scenario instead of actually trying to introduce me to a community that the college has.

Similar to Ransom, Laurie believes that institutions using recruitment materials to represent diversity that they don't have is unethical:

I think if a school like [my undergraduate institution] had materials that were all people of color...that would be unethical because that school is very white...even though it is a public school. But I think something like [my current institution], where there is more diversity...I think it's okay as long as it's still proportional to the amount...of like diverse students they have.

According to the students mentioned in this section, the use of images of diversity in recruitment materials is unethical when it does not represent the actual amount of diversity at that institution. Two interview participants believe that you can mitigate this unethical practice by providing a disclaimer saying that the images are not accurate or by providing access to statistical data. Two other participants pointed out that not accurately representing the amount of diversity at your institution is deceptive. This idea that misrepresentation of diversity is deceptive relates to the next major theme regarding the ethics of using exaggerated diversity in recruitment materials.

Misrepresenting Diversity is Unethical

Another important theme in the interviews is the idea that misrepresenting diversity in recruitment materials is unethical or even harmful. This theme is related to the answers from the previous section about accuracy. As interview participants pointed out, inaccurate representation of diversity can be seen as unethical behavior. Suzanne believes that institutions making an effort to be

more diverse is admirable, but the motivation behind that effort is important. When asked if it's OK for colleges and universities to use images of people from diverse backgrounds in their recruitment materials even if the school isn't very diverse, she said:

Yeah, that's a, that's a hard question. I mean, I do respect the fact of them wanting to be more diverse for a school that maybe isn't diverse. So, if they're trying to work their way up and they don't really have much [diversity] to work with then I would understand in that kind of circumstance, but if they're doing it just for the aspect to look a certain way then I think that it's kind of based on like morals and stuff. That's a really tough question.

Like Suzanne, John believes motivation is important. When he looks at college recruitment materials, they come across as insincere:

I look and I see that there's something fishy going on there. It's just that three people don't lay out a blanket and sit in the park you know? You don't see people smiling carrying textbooks. It seems uncanny. It seems odd.

Jason has a much stronger opinion about the use of people from underrepresented backgrounds in college recruitment materials. For Jason, it's not just about questionable motivation. He believes that exaggerating the amount of diversity at an institution is purposefully deceptive. When asked about colleges using diversity in their recruitment materials, Jason said:

No that's lying, like I do feel lied to. I really think universities if they want to fix this whole diversity thing they should focus on [diverse] classes instead of presenting themselves as diverse because I promise you diverse people want to study diverse subjects...I find it as like a way for them to bring comfort to their white students so their white students can feel pleased that they're going to a diverse school. They can feel woke because oh you know "look I'm going to this school where a girl can wear a hijab and sit on the lawn and talk," but that's not actually how it is. It's just a Caucasian echo chamber...like when you have a group of kids in your class a group of white kids arguing about whether or not you should have rights or when you have like a ton of white people in your class talking about race and like it's very discomfoting.

As you can see from his statement, for Jason, the use of exaggerated diversity in recruitment materials is a symbol for his view of the university as a whole. Jason views the use of diversity in recruitment materials as a way to make people at predominantly white institutions feel better about the institution not being diverse.

In Markus' interview, he told me about his expectation that [his current] university would be a very diverse institution. He told me about their recruiting events and materials and how they emphasized their diversity. However, when he began attending, the institution was much less diverse than he was led to believe. This was a common theme among interview participants. [The student's current institution] was not as diverse as they expected it to be. Markus was especially disappointed with the diversity in the faculty:

I know we're a Hispanic serving institution...That's cool but when they try to recruit...I went to Catholic high

school, and they had an event only for the Hispanics and minority students to come and talk with college recruiters. They hyped that up a lot at [my current institution] when they came to my school but as soon as I get here, we don't have a lot of Hispanic professors. We have in my time since I came in 2014 as undergrad, and I'll graduate in May with my masters, one was African American, one was Asian. So yeah, it's cool with showing a diverse pamphlet showing we have a myriad of students of various backgrounds but that's not true. Yes, have the diverse background. Have those brochures showing, you know, groups of everyone, but be more in line with what the reality is...Transparency is what we're shooting for.

Although all interview participants, except for one, indicated that they thought recruiting for diversity was a valid goal for colleges and universities, no interview participants indicated that using exaggerated depictions of diverse groups of students as a means to attract students from underrepresented backgrounds was a good ethical decision. Even knowing that college would likely improve the lives of these students, interview participants still saw deceptive depictions of diversity as morally wrong.

DISCUSSION

Trying to bring in students from diverse backgrounds into academic programs brings up a difficult issue. How can administrators bring in a diverse group of students when they don't already have a group of students and faculty to whom students from underrepresented backgrounds can relate (Blackmon, 2004)? How can program administrators work on being more inclusive if all the voices on the campus are homogenized? Should colleges and universities use deceptive recruitment materials as a way to recruit a diverse group of students into academic programs to create a more diverse and inclusive space for students who will attend later? Does the eventual development of a more diverse faculty and industry justify using deceptive means to recruit students now? After all, a student who attends college has a much better chance at class mobility and financial success (Bowen, 1977; Card, 2001; Dearden, McGranahan, & Sianesi, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). University administrators might be tempted to say, "By attracting underrepresented students, are we not giving them an opportunity they might not otherwise have had?"

As pointed out by both survey results and interview participants, inaccuracy in college recruitment materials is seen as a form of deception. Students, especially BIPOC students, who view recruitment materials with exaggerated numbers of diverse students feel manipulated. For example, students may attend an institution of higher education with the expectation of a certain level of diversity and support for students from diverse backgrounds, only to be met with disappointment. Seven out of 10 interview participants indicated that they expected [the university] to be very diverse based on the communication they received. Five of the interview participants mentioned their disappointment with the amount of diversity they found at the institution when they enrolled. Students who enroll at an institution with the expectation of a diverse campus only to realize that the institution is not nearly as diverse as advertised may form opinions about that institution that can not only damage the institution's reputation but may also have repercussions for the students' success.

From the survey results, we see that the majority of the total

group of respondents chose the deontological moral imperative over the utilitarian ends-versus-means approach of exaggerating diversity in recruitment materials. However, the issue seems to be more important to people of color. Fifty percent of white student respondents believe showing diversity in college recruitment materials, even if it misrepresents the diversity at the institution, shows that the institution supports diversity. Only 28% of BIPOC students believe the same. Of white respondents, 44% said that colleges should be required to accurately represent their diversity in recruitment materials, even if it means less BIPOC attend, compared to 69% of people of color. Thirty-three percent of white respondents believe that colleges and universities should be able to show a disproportionate amount of diversity in recruitment materials if it means more people will benefit from higher education while only 6% of BIPOC respondents believe the same.

Although a majority of survey respondents indicated that colleges should not exaggerate their diversity in their recruitment materials, the indication was much higher among BIPOC students. This may be because students of color have more at stake. For them, the ends of possibly getting more students of color through the doors of the institution may not justify the means of misrepresenting diversity to get them there, and their fears are justified. Although the gap in the number of students of color being admitted to predominantly white institutions (PWI) versus the number of white students being admitted is shrinking (Haycock, 2001; Ohene-Oake, 2017). PWIs often lack the support structures needed to ensure students persist to graduation (Casselman, 2014; McClain & Perry, 2017).

For students of color, there are more than just moral implications for being drawn to an institution under false pretenses. Program administrators often paint a rosy picture of the experience the student will have at an institution, leaving out harsh realities, in order to convince the student to choose said institution. Does a little embellishment justify the boost diversity will give to academic departments and the opportunities that will be possible for students of color who enroll? Program administrators may attempt to answer these questions and implement strategies themselves, but people in power are not the best equipped to answer these types of questions. This is why the inclusion of diverse voices is so important. Researchers and administrators need to work with their marginalized students to identify areas of marginalization. Coalitional approaches which include listening to and being guided by those who are marginalized can aid administrators as they strive to reason out ethical recruitment strategies. If the intent of recruiting a diverse class of students is to bring students from underrepresented backgrounds in purely for diversity's sake, then the intent of those doing the recruiting is misguided. However, if program administrators bring in students from underrepresented backgrounds with the intention of inviting them to shape department policies, implement effective recruitment strategies, and support students to graduation, that is a goal rooted in inclusivity which puts the needs of students first.

Limitations

This study represents only a small sample size of students. Although the data seems to point to students' general disapproval of colleges and universities exaggerating their diversity in recruitment materials, this sample size is not large enough to be generalizable.

The language used in both the survey and interview questions may have influenced the answers students gave. Although participants seem to understand the practical nature of utilitarianism, they

also seem to identify honesty in communication as a moral imperative. Because words such as "honestly" were associated with communication in recruitment materials, it's possible that some students simply rejected the deceptive communication associated with exaggerating diversity in recruitment materials because they viewed it as morally wrong rather than weighing the practice with possible consequences.

Future Research

As mentioned above, this paper represents only a small sample of students and an even smaller sample of BIPOC students. Future research regarding the recruitment of BIPOC students should include the voices of marginalized people. Research projects could include a UX analysis of recruitment materials focusing on the effectiveness of the use of images of diversity, interviews with BIPOC who have successfully completed a degree program, and those who have dropped out to find out how the promise of support for diversity influenced their college decision and how this decision affected them in the long run. Another project could include interviews with BIPOC faculty members to learn their perceptions of using images of people from underrepresented groups in recruitment materials. These projects could result in recommendations for the types of images that should be used in college recruitment materials.

Researchers should consider examining the ethics of college recruitment through the lens of other ethical frameworks. For example, Colton, Holmes, and Walwema (2016) extended Katz's (1992) thinking (as discussed in the literature review) through an exploration of the ethics of tactical technical communication used to further social justice causes. Colton et al. caution against thinking in ethical binaries and advocate for adoption of Cavarero's (2011) ethic of care:

For Cavarero wounding and caring do not correspond to a basic binary (e.g., wounding = bad, caring = good). Rather, these terms offer a set of fluid ratios to allow us to characterize the totality of relations of those affected by a given tactical action, and, in turn, to attribute ethical behavior which, in some cases, will involve wounding certain individuals to help ensure our collective ability to ensure an ethics of care for the most vulnerable. (Colton et. al., 2016, p. 60)

The ethic of care, along with several other frameworks, could be used to give valuable insights into the ethics of recruiting students from marginalized backgrounds.

Another consideration for future research would be to explore whether accurate depictions of campus diversity negatively affect campuses by reducing the diversity of the campus and reinforcing the status quo.

CONCLUSION

Having a diverse student body is advantageous to students from both underrepresented and majority groups. Diverse classes have been shown to increase interpersonal understanding and cognitive growth, as well as an increase in positive learning outcomes for all parties (Gurin, Dey, Gurin, & Hurtado, 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, & Parente, 2001). Besides enriching the higher education experience and adding a variety of viewpoints to our dialogue, increasing the variety of student backgrounds in academic programs will also

likely create a chain reaction that will reach into the academic and professional world. The more students from underrepresented backgrounds enroll in academic programs, the more they will fill graduate programs, take up faculty positions, and move into industry (Savage & Mattson, 2011).

As stated previously, diverse representation in recruitment materials often does not reflect the overall diversity of the campus. This type of inaccurate representation in recruitment materials was linked with deception in the eyes of the participants of this study. Students who view deceptive recruitment materials may feel tricked when they arrive on campus and realize that they are now the student on the cover of the brochure that they saw while in high school (*160over90*, 2012). Students aren't looking for a few diverse faces in a crowd. They're looking for a community in which they can relate and feel comfortable (Blackmon, 2004). They're looking for faculty and scholars who look like them and have similar backgrounds and values. And beyond adequate representation, they're looking for a place to be included and heard. They're looking for a voice: "...consideration of inclusion can often be characterized as voice, pointing to the idea that allowing a space for voice eliminates oppressive silences..." (Jones, 2016, p. 478).

In reporting the importance of accuracy in representation for college recruitment materials I do not mean to imply that any level of minority representation that does not match the institution's demographic distribution is deceptive. As Pippert, et al. state, "we are not suggesting that colleges publish viewbooks that exactly mirror their current student body. It would be ludicrous to expect that every photographic image of the student body be tied directly to the percentage enrollment of that group" (2013, p. 276). However, university administrators should remember, people in privileged positions have power to silence or support the voices of marginalized or oppressed populations (Jones, 2016). When administrators only use students of color to further an agenda of increased physical diversity, they are missing an important aspect of diversity which is inclusion, that is to say, creating spaces for diverse voices to be heard. Students of color may interpret a recruitment brochure to mean that a college or university is an inclusive place that encourages diverse points of view in an inclusive atmosphere. However, if a student comes to campus and discovers a different reality, her/his voice may effectively be silenced when s/he realizes that s/he is not in the inclusive environment s/he thought would be there.

Although using images of people from diverse backgrounds in recruitment materials seems like a logical choice to some, this choice can be harmful. Colleges and universities want to show support for diversity and want to attract students from diverse backgrounds, but many lack the support structures needed to support BIPOC students (Casselman, 2014; McClain & Perry, 2017). As we can see from the results of this study, students of color do not want to see exaggerated images of diversity. These images don't represent acceptance, they represent failure to do the real work of inclusion needed to attract students of color and support them to graduation.

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