

Supporting a Moral Growth Mindset Among College Students

Authors : Kate Allman, Heather Maranges, Elise Dykhuis

Abstract : Moral Growth Mindset (MGM) is the belief that one has the capacity to become a more moral person, as opposed to a fixed conception of one's moral ability and capacity (Han et al., 2018). Building from Dweck's work in incremental implicit theories of intelligence (2008), Moral Growth Mindset (Han et al., 2020) extends growth mindsets into the moral dimension. The concept of MGM has the potential to help researchers understand how both mindsets and interventions can impact character development, and it has even been shown to have connections to voluntary service engagement (Han et al., 2018). Understanding the contexts in which MGM might be cultivated could help to promote the further cultivation of character, in addition to prosocial behaviors like service engagement, which may, in turn, promote larger scale engagement in social justice-oriented thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In particular, college may be a place to intentionally cultivate a growth mindset toward moral capacities, given the unique developmental and maturational components of the college experience, including contextual opportunity (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006) and independence requiring the constant consideration, revision, and internalization of personal values (Lapsley & Woodbury, 2016). In a semester-long, quasi-experimental study, we examined the impact of a pedagogical approach designed to cultivate college student character development on participants' MGM. With an intervention (n=69) and a control group (n=97; Pre-course: 27% Men; 66% Women; 68% White; 18% Asian; 2% Black; <1% Hispanic/Latino), we investigated whether college courses that intentionally incorporate character education pedagogy (Lamb, Brant, Brooks, 2021) affect a variety of psychosocial variables associated with moral thoughts, feelings, identity, and behavior (e.g. moral growth mindset, honesty, compassion, etc.). The intervention group consisted of 69 undergraduate students (Pre-course: 40% Men; 52% Women; 68% White; 10.5% Black; 7.4% Asian; 4.2% Hispanic/Latino) that voluntarily enrolled in five undergraduate courses that encouraged students to engage with key concepts and methods of character development through the application of research-based strategies and personal reflection on goals and experiences. Moral Growth Mindset was measured using the four-item Moral Growth Mindset scale (Han et al., 2020), with items such as You can improve your basic morals and character considerably on a six-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores of MGM indicate a stronger belief that one can become a more moral person with personal effort. Reliability at Time 1 was Cronbach's $\alpha = .833$, and at Time 2 Cronbach's $\alpha = .772$. An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to explore whether post-course MGM scores were different between the intervention and control when controlling for pre-course MGM scores. The ANCOVA indicated significant differences in MGM between groups post-course, $F(1,163) = 8.073$, $p = .005$, $R^2 = .11$, where descriptive statistics indicate that intervention scores were higher than the control group at post-course. Results indicate that intentional character development pedagogy can be leveraged to support the development of Moral Growth Mindset and related capacities in undergraduate settings.

Keywords : moral personality, character education, incremental theories of personality, growth mindset

Conference Title : ICMPP 2022 : International Conference on Moral Psychology and Personality

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : January 14-15, 2022