Perspectives, Motivations, and Resistance: Investigating Employee Responses to Employer-Sponsored Diversity Training

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Perspectives, Motivations, and Resistance: Investigating Employee Responses to Employer-Sponsored Diversity Training

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my partner, Megan, who encouraged and supported me to pursue my dreams and carried the load during times of stress throughout this journey. To my father and brother, George, and Josh, thank you for always supporting my educational journey and challenging me to be the best version of myself, personally and professionally. Lastly, I also dedicate this dissertation to my late mother, Cheryl, who always encouraged and believed that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. I am forever grateful for my family for their compassion, support, encouragement, and presence in my life.
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Abstract

This qualitative action research study investigated employee reactions, motivations, and perspectives toward employer-sponsored diversity training programs. Through a qualitative exploratory case study, this research study explored the perceptions of how a diverse sampling of people individually, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives. In order to further explore this topic, a theoretical framework consisting of self-determination theory and culturally relevant pedagogy served as the primary method to guide the research question, literature reviews, and data design, collection, and analysis process. Self-determination theory provided the primary motivational factors for employees. Culturally relevant pedagogy provided the primary justification for moving forward by emphasizing the need for curriculum developers to think about learning and cultural differences and always with an eye out for equity and social justice. This qualitative action research study utilized one-on-one interviews as the primary data collection method. The findings of this study indicate that while most of the research participants agreed on the importance of including a DEI-supportive curriculum, the appropriateness level, professionalism, and mandatory nature of DEI training programs were in question. Therefore, a gap still exists between acknowledging and applying what employees are learning and what employers desire.
# Table of Contents

Dedication.......................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements.............................................................................................................. iv

Abstract............................................................................................................................... v

Chapter 1: Introduction........................................................................................................ 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review............................................................................................... 19

Chapter 3: Research Methods and Design......................................................................... 51

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings............................................................................... 69

Chapter 5: Implications and Recommendations................................................................. 104

References........................................................................................................................... 117

Appendix A: IRB Approval.................................................................................................... 127

Appendix B: Interview Invitation Letter............................................................................. 128

Appendix C: Interview Questions......................................................................................... 130
Chapter 1

Introduction

My passion for researching and promoting diversity equity and inclusive (DEI) practices stems from my personal and professional experiences. Throughout my life, I have been a recipient of unacknowledged, unintended, and unperceived privileges due to my social identity. I am a white, cisgender, straight male who works as an Instructional Designer for a global organization. As an instructional designer, I construct digital and in-person corporate training courses, curricula, and materials. Digital and in-person mediums create an opportunity to infuse DEI measures within the curriculum deliberately, intentionally, and naturally. As a learning and development (L&D) professional working in the private sector for the past five years, and with four years of experience studying DEI and DEI supportive practices, I strive to utilize my position of privilege and power to bring awareness and support to help to de-marginalize the traditionally marginalized. I have witnessed first-hand accounts of the exclusion of intersectional approaches and the prominence of microaggressions within multiple corporate training environments.

Additionally, over the last five years, I have often been tasked to develop diversity training programs in addition to employee and client-facing corporate training material. In my current and previous roles, I often had to defend and argue choices to include actors or characters with multiple social identities—for example, an LGBTQ+ woman of color. Ultimately, the organizations I worked for treated DEI as a “checklist” for
institutional objectives rather than its intended purpose. The check listing of diversity-related content regulates complex problems into singular solutions, thereby perpetuating the cis-gendered White heteronormative dominant socio-cultural norms. Considering my positionality, this research study utilizes an insider-outsider perspective, as the study was conducted outside my current organization. At the same time, my sampling population includes individuals whose cultural identities does and does not match my own.

The United States workforce is diverse, yet that does not describe the entire story. Individuals can have multiple social identities, such as their gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic, religious beliefs, national origin, as well as emotional or developmental disabilities and abilities. People with multiple social minority statuses can face even more complex challenges throughout their personal and professional lives (Alfred et al., 2019; Crenshaw, 1990). Therefore, when analyzing an organization’s susceptibility to institutional bias, one must understand all social identities of an individual and how their social identities influence and define the role and status of a person within their social environment.

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021; 2022), women, ethnic, and social minorities remain underrepresented in the workforce. As of 2020, the racial demographics showed white workers making up the majority of the workforce by a margin of 77%. Furthermore, Latin, African, and Asian Americans comprised 18%, 13%, and 6%, respectively. While the racial demographics heavily lean White, the gender gap is narrower, yet still majority male. Women comprise an estimated 46.8% of the workforce population. While the notion that business and business leadership is predominately a masculine career is no longer accurate, that belief can still resonate with
some workforce members creating resistance throughout the process (Crevani et al., 2010; Wilson & Tagg, 2010).

Considering the majority of modern-day corporate employment opportunities list a bachelor’s degree as a requirement for employment, the socio-economic conditions for the fulfillment may provide socio-economic challenges to individuals pursuing higher education. A 2020 study shows that 54% of White students achieve an associate or bachelor’s degree, compared to 46% of African American students and 34% of Latinx or Hispanic students. (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021) These statistics become even more staggering with the inclusion of the sample population within the context where individuals of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds attend post-secondary educational institutions. Nationwide, only 25% of White students begin their post-secondary education career at a community college, compared to 50% of Latinx students and 33% of Black students (Person et al., 2017). Additionally, 53% of Latinx or Hispanic labor force over the age of 25 either hold a high school diploma and did not attend college, or do not have a high school diploma (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). While the majority of the Latinx workforce did not attend college or did not receive a high school diploma, they have the highest employment ratio. Among adult Hispanic and Latinx men have they have employment-population ratio of 74.6 percent. Conversely, African American men had the lowest, at 60.5 percent.

Understanding issues of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, as well as gender is critical when examining motivation of employees.

Gender is a social construct; therefore, we view the world, our culture, and our environment through a gendered perspective (Denton, 2016; Forbes, 2014; Wade and
Ferree, 2019). Gender norms take the shape of a binary concept, masculine or feminine. Any deviation from the binary can result in oppression, exclusion, marginalization, or discrimination. Even individuals who conform to the gender binary can still face oppression, exclusion, and marginalization from the dominant group. An example of oppression in the workplace would be the wage disparity between men and women. For example, in 2021 the median weekly earnings for men ages 16 and older were $1,097. Comparatively, amongst the same demographic, the median weekly earnings for women were $912 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a). Gender, gender roles, and sexual orientation continue to factor into the overall impact of employee motivation as well as how navigate within their social environment.

The United States population is diverse, of the estimated 255 million adults in the United States, it is estimated that 4.5% identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and 0.3% identify as transgender (LGBT Proportion of Population, 2019). Additionally, between 2016 and 2019, the percentage of individuals who identify as LGBT grew by 1% (Goldberg & Conron, 2020; LGBT Proportion of Population, 2019). While the population is growing, so is the increased prejudice and discrimination of LGBTQ+ individuals. According to Hennessy and Bloomberg (2020), “forty-two percent of LGBT youth say the community in which they live is not accepting of LGBT people” (p. 41). Discrimination, oppression, prejudice, and marginalization directly impact the life of LGBTQ+ individuals. 40% of transgender persons attempt suicide at least once, with the majority trying before the age of twenty-five (Hennessy & Bloomberg, 2020). This data shows physical growth, supporting the rationale for increasing language representation and development within training programs.
According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), as of the 2023 legislative session, there are 492 anti-LGBTQ+ bills proposed, passed, advancing in the legislature, deleted, or challenged in court (American Civil Liberties Union, 2023). These 492 bills are categorized into seven subthemes corresponding to the targeted rights. Those categories are accurate identification, civil rights, free speech or expression, healthcare, public accommodations, schools and education, and other anti-LGBTQ+ bills. So far in 2023, only three states, New York, Michigan, and Illinois, did not propose what the ACLU interpreted to be an anti-LGBTQ+ bill. Texas proposed the most so far, with a proportionate share of 53 of 492.

As a term, neurodiversity emphasizes “differences in individual brain function” in addition to behavioral traits as it is “regarded as part of normal variation in the population” (Clouder et al., 2020, p. 758). According to a recent study, 5% of the world’s population is diagnosed with ADHD, roughly 1 in 160 children is diagnosed with ASD, 1% with Tourette’s syndrome, and 10% is diagnosed with dyslexia (Clouder et al., 2020; Doyle & McDowall, 2022). In addition to diagnosed clinical neurological differences, social anxiety and discomfort can also be applied to this term. For example, 90% of the United States population feels anxious about public speaking (Ortiz, 2020). Neurodiversity reaffirms that there is not a typical or normal mental ability; instead, an individual’s brain may be different rather than wrong (Clouder et al., 2020). It is important to note, neurodiversity does not always describe a neurological deficit; therefore, it should not be used as a quantifier for a lesser cognitive function (Clouder et al., 2020).
Furthermore, conversations surrounding neurodiversity can be controversial due to the history of applying derogatory labels and categorizations such as neurotypical or differently abled or classifying neurological differences as a disability. Furthermore, social factors such as socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity apply a compounding disadvantage to neurodivergent individuals (Clouder et al., 2020). This compound disadvantage is primarily a result of societal perceptions rather than the neurological condition (Clouder et al., 2020). Finally, neurodivergent individuals can sometimes be derogatorily called a “hidden” or “invisible” disability (Doyle & McDowall, 2019). This derogatory term and misconceptions are due to the nature that a lot of these neurodiverse conditions are not visible. As a result, neurodiverse students and employees often receive less help or support.

Understanding the role gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic, as well as emotional or developmental disabilities and abilities plays in the context of power relations embedded within social identities is critical to examining the majority-minority power imbalance within the United States corporate workforce. Gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and physical or cognitive disabilities and abilities are just some of the socio-cultural identities that comprise the United States workforce. There are other forms of identities that employees may describe themselves as such, therefore it is important to consider all forms of socio-cultural identities and the challenges they may face when navigating social situations.

Diversity training is a common occurrence in the modern-day workplace. However, the objectives are missing crucial elements that may result in less desirable outcomes. Diversity training demonstrates a pattern of focusing on analyzing specific
diversity training outcomes rather than understanding the underlying reasons for resistance and receptiveness (Israel et al., 2017). Therefore Israel et al. (2017) assert that “Investigating responses of diversity training participants in the process of training may help to uncover factors that contribute to training outcomes and can inform how such training is delivered” (p. 200). This study allows for flexibility in analyzing adulthood training programs.

The goal for teachers and curriculum developers should be to create a welcoming and caring environment for all rather than focusing on singular issues (Noddings, 2012). Classrooms where social equity does not exist, cannot lead to a caring and welcoming environment (Noddings, 2012). This data is vital because the current cis-gendered White heteronormative narrative reinforces the notion that non-dominate culture-related topics are controversial, thereby perpetuating that such issues should be ignored (Fredman et al., 2015). Diversity training reform must reject the importance of singular social identities and instead turn their perspectives to focus on an intersectional approach to diversity training (Crenshaw, 1990). DEI must be conscious and proactive. Otherwise, the singular lens will only yield singular results.

**Problem of Practice**

The problem of practice for this study is the lack of motivation for employees to participate in diversity-related professional development sessions. The purpose of this action research study was derived from an examination of how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives.
In my experience as a creator and active participant in corporate training, individuals who attend corporate training generally fall into two categories: those who view it as an opportunity to upskill and grow and those who see it as a burden, hindrance, or extra work beyond their normal scope. Considering the recently increased propensity for corporate-sponsored DEI curriculums, it is essential to investigate employee motivation for participation and knowledge acquisition and transferability after the sessions. Prior research exists that draws connections between employee motivation and their learning experience (Alhejji et al., 2016; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Israel et al., 2017; King et al., 2010; Noddings, 2012; 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). However, research has yet to fully explore the possibility of a correlation between employees’ motivation as it relates to the implementation of employer-driven institutional objectives through the lens of their training courses.

Throughout 2023, DEI and specifically LGBTQ+ representation has been frequently considered a negative “buzzword” or used as a reason for a public and vocal boycott by a portion of the general public (Creswell, 2023; Holman & Creswell, 2023). Most notably, Target, Anheuser Busch, Coors Brewing Company, Nike, and Starbucks received backlash based on their support or rejection of LGBTQ+ supportive representation. Each of these organizations was put into a position where they had to intentionally and tactfully choose how to respond to criticism and move forward while keeping empathy and public trust in their organization. These institutions and their controversies are representative of the figurative battleground for both school curricula and corporate operations.
The decisions made by these large publicly traded companies create case studies for all other organizations to analyze as a method of prevention, preparedness, or next steps. Regarding prevention and preparedness, that role often gets placed within the hands of the L&D department through the development and delivery of their diversity training curriculum.

One of the critical areas of focus within my role as a curriculum leader is ensuring the content my team designs reflects our organization’s diverse employee population. When constructing a digital e-learning training course, character creation, voice acting, and various employment social situations will be necessary to develop. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain a representative and inclusive demographic. A second area of concern is accessibility and ensuring that individuals with disabilities will not be discouraged or unable to complete the course. Within corporate training, learners comprise a large, diverse population; therefore, the curriculum must match this diversity.

As an instructional designer within a large global organization, I need to factor in a vast network of individuals who will be taking and completing my courses. These individuals can range from internal new hires straight from college to tenured experienced professionals with decades of knowledge to external employees. This group also contains individuals from a variety of racial, gender, ethnic, and ability backgrounds. Therefore, accessibility and representation must be at the forefront of my mind. While these factors are important to me as an instructional designer, the extensiveness of my inclusion sometimes is at odds with institutional objectives, such as project duration, cost, scope, or personal management bias.
I remember sitting in a virtual conference room a few years ago, proposing a simulation-based e-learning course where the simulation would be acted through human actors. This simulation method is a normal option, especially for larger budgeted and large profile projects. After discussing the character descriptions, backgrounds, and socio-cultural identities, one of the senior managers questioned and argued for the grammatical mistake of the inclusion of the they/them pronoun. Additionally, another manager remarked that as long as we have an equal number of males to females, the rest of the demographics do not matter. The theme of personal bias and unconscious bias continued throughout that project duration.

While my role as a curriculum leader results from my passion and desire to de-marginalize the marginalized within our society and my organization, that sentiment does not always hold true for the learners who participate in the diversity training programs I design. Resistance is a common experience for trainers and educators, especially from those who participate in a mandatory course that they would otherwise opt out of. Resistance by those who do not feel a sense of relatedness to the material can take the form of verbal and nonverbal behaviors, such as conversing during the lecture, protesting the material, using their cell phone, joking with or talking to their neighbor, not participating in group activities, and sitting with their head on the table. Methods of resistance can also occur due to an institutional leadership’s desire to build employee competence within the DEI subject matter while not providing autonomy to their employees to participate in the programs. Therefore, when constructing a diversity-related curriculum, it is crucial to examine the resistance of individuals as a method of prevention and planning.
Prior to conducting this action research study, my most commonly held belief for the underlying cause for resistance would be due to the individual’s own discomfort with the subject matter. Some participants and members of organizational leadership felt that the emphasis on diversity and inclusion was unnecessary and, in their view, had the potential to create unnecessary divisions among employees.

**Research Question**

This study examined the following research question:

1. Within corporate and education settings, how does a sampling of employees from various backgrounds perceive and react to the objectives, benefits, and efficacy of employer-sponsored diversity training programs?

**Epistemological Positioning**

This study utilizes the social reconstruction epistemological methodology as a means to understand how individuals perceive their environment. According to Schiro (2008), the goal of social reconstructionism is to remove detrimental characteristics or ideologies from one’s culture. Counts (1932) laid the groundwork for the foundation and publicity of social reconstructionism. The author states, “our social institutions and practices, all of them, should be critically examined in the light of such a vision” (Counts, 1932, p.62). This vision refers to future possibilities after achieving societal change (Counts, 1932). Paulo Freire identified and championed education as a means for society to shift away from oppression (Freire, 2000). In this identification, Freire (2000) believed that the oppressed must resist the oppression and, more importantly, not perpetuate the oppression onto others.
A social reconstruction curriculum emphasizes four key topics. First, culture is a byproduct of power (Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Since culture is represented by who wields power, it is logical that culture can change based on who has the power. Second, it organizes and constructs a curriculum based on diverse backgrounds and learning styles (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Third, students should have the ability to examine the inequality and discrimination within their environment (Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). This first-hand examination allows the student to conceptualize and process this information through personal experience. Finally, it reinforces that students need to act as change agents for society (Schiro, 2008). After examining how individuals interpret and perceive the world. This action research study utilizes a theoretical framework consisting of two main theories.

**Theoretical Framework**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that theoretical frameworks are “the underlying structure, the scaffolding, or frame of your study” (p. 85). The authors further explain that every research project is affected by a theoretical framework. According to them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), theoretical frameworks comprise two objectives. The first objective is to provide context for the author’s topic. The second objective is to help the researcher identify critical terms, similar issues, questions to explore, or relevant data. Theoretical frameworks allow the reader to connect with the researcher through a shared understanding of underlying concepts (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Merriam & Tisdel, 2016).

In addition to defining theoretical frameworks, Meriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that a researcher’s worldview influences what they research and how they will conduct
the study. This worldview will additionally influence the lens through which the researcher frames their study. This study uses two main theoretical perspectives to understand a culturally responsive and inclusive training program. The two theoretical perspectives are: *culturally relevant pedagogy*, and *self-determination theory*. While culturally relevant pedagogy is primarily an educational theory, the underlying theoretical components are applicable to the corporate sector. These frameworks help to shape the understanding of how corporate (DEI) programs acknowledge and address the intersectional identities of their workforce.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) was coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) and defined as a “pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committee to collective, not merely individual empowerment” (p. 47). CRP emphasizes the importance of educators creating and deliberately delivering material according to the audience's sociopolitical environment. In addition, CRP stresses the importance of including cultural identity, which leads to student success. The reinforcement of cultural identity allows for a deeper connection of the learning principles as the curriculum shifts from a task-based learning system to a personalized learning method.

CRP consists of three main components, *student learning*, *cultural competence*, and *sociopolitical competence* (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014). Student learning refers to the increase in students' knowledge as a product of their learning environment. Ladson-Billings (2014) defines cultural competence as “the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture” (p.75). Finally, sociopolitical competence asserts that the acquired
knowledge should go beyond the educational setting and be used to “identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems (p. 75).

**Self-Determination Theory**

The origin of SDT dates back to 1985, with the publication of *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. In this seminal work, the authors examine the psychological needs in motivation and thereby creating the purpose for self-determination. According to the authors, SDT provides the framework to understand the factors that drive individuals to act in a certain manner (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Essential to SDT is the examination of autonomous and controlled motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The core of SDT and motivation lies in the psychological phenomenon of human needs, or as Ryan and Deci (2017) explain, the “fundamental nutrients or supports that individuals must have to thrive” (p. 81). According to the authors, this basic need and essential need is critical to understanding the implications of behavior and action. It is through the examination of the necessary “nutrients” of human needs that the authors extrapolate the driving factors for psychological development thereby establishing the three components of SDT: *autonomy, competence, and relatedness*.

First, autonomy can be defined as the ability of individuals to make choices based on their own free will. Autonomy focuses on an intrinsic motivation where individuals are more willing and accepting to act when they do not feel pressured. Next, competence refers to the basic desire to feel a sense of effectiveness and mastery of their environment and social context. This factor holds intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as it leads to a greater sense of satisfaction for individuals to learn, develop, and grow. Finally,
relatedness is the social connectedness and desire for belongingness within or between a group or a group setting (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The sense of belongingness motivates individuals to complete a task or action.

**Methodology**

A qualitative method with an action research case study design was used as the primary research paradigm due to the study’s emphasis on human society and culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the instance of this research study, the focus of the interview would be their shared experiences facing challenges and issues regarding race, gender, and sexual identity discrimination and underrepresentation as it relates to a socially construct environment. While all of the participants attended different diversity related training programs created and held by various organizations, their experiences and perceptions provide the primary means of examination.

Practitioners of action research tend to be more familiar with their research topics because of their insider positionality (Efron & Ravid, 2020; Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the case of this action research study, my experience as an instructional designer and as a learner allowed me to witness first-hand the motivational levels and participation rates among corporate employees, while also having a deeper understanding of the issue, thereby fully committing to the research topic. This qualitative research design envisions a clear intervention pathway for positive implementation. The intervention occurs through a two-step integration of company and researcher objectives. The primary intervention occurs through the understanding of the underlying motivation for employees to seek out and participate in diversity training courses. The secondary intervention occurs by developing and promoting a more inclusive and knowledgeable
workforce on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. These two interventions were selected to answer this study’s research question. This research project aimed to understand the effects of inclusivity and representation within a workforce training curriculum.

All participants were un-paid volunteers who were provided the option to withdraw their involvement at any time during the interview process. This qualitative research study was conducted entirely virtually through Zoom conferences, phone conversations, and email correspondence. Participant recruitment occurred through an email conversation starting with my former manager, then transitioned into a phone conversation to discuss my research topic, employee requirements and expectations, and confirming the confidentiality and anonymity procedure. After this conversation, I held a preliminary virtual web-conference to meet with interested participants and gather contact information. After the initial contact, a snowball sampling strategy was implemented to gather more participants. This snowball sampling strategy encouraged the current volunteers to refer individuals they know who might be interested in participating in the study. Members of the sample population comprised of two categories, those that work in the corporate environment, and those that work in an academic setting.

In order to gather and examine the lived experiences of employees who participated in a corporate sponsored diversity training program, a interview was conducted as the primary data collection method. This interview consisted of a one-on-one discussion between the researcher and the participant subjects. The data collection source was selected as a means to discover and gather insightful data relevant to this study’s problem of practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative action research case study utilized interviews as the primary data collection sources. Interviews were selected as the primary method due to methodology of discovering and gathering insightful data relevant to this study’s problem of practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research question posed in this study used data collected from this method. Data collection methods should complement and grow with a qualitative research project. Integrating interviews as a primary research tool allows a qualitative study to create a holistic picture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews were used as guided conversations to explore and understand participant’s interpretations, perspectives, prior knowledge, and experience regarding this study’s research topic. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the qualitative interview should be structured and guided by open-ended questions. This data collection method was implemented due to the qualitative aspects of this research study. Semi-structured interviews are the ideal data collection method for this qualitative research study which utilizes a case study research paradigm (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative thematic analysis approach was employed for the study. This research method was selected due to my desired goal of addressing a current issue, understanding the targeted population through in-depth conversations, and improving the current practice of diversity training within my organization. One-on-one interviews served as the primary method of data collection for this study as a way to discover participants' perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds on DEI training objectives.
Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter one provided an overview of the problem of practice, theoretical framework, researcher’s positionality, and methodology. Chapter two will provide an in-depth literature review and contemporary research regarding cultural competence, the theoretical framework, resistance, and diversity training. Chapter three will provide this action research study’s methodological design and data collection modality. Next, chapter four will describe the findings and analysis of the action research study through the lens of the theoretical framework. Lastly, chapter 5 summarizes the entire research study and discusses the implications of the findings and provide recommendations for future research projects examining cultural competency in the workplace.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Researching existing literature brought forth a common theme: struggling to use an acronym or label lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other individuals. The topic of gender and sexual identity creates a paradigm where each author must define and rationalize their labels. Through this methodology, many authors use differing acronyms. One author may use LGBT while others use LGBTQIA+, or they may leave off the "T." Uniquely, the "A" can stand for an ally, while others may define it as asexual.

Additionally, some authors reject labels altogether (Ng, 2003; Savin-Williams, 2009). Therefore, to maintain a measure of uniformity, this study will default to LGBTQ+ as a spectrum consisting of non-heterosexual and other non-binary individuals. The topic of labeling is a sensitive and controversial issue with numerous implications (Duxbury, 2004; Ng, 2013; Savin-Williams, 2009). Cultural competency within diversity training regarding gender and sexual identities as a field has, in some capacities, grown. While in other areas, the field stagnated.

According to Efron and Ravid (2020), a literature review provides background information to contextualize the research. The review of literature presents an epistemological and theoretical rationalization for the study to explore the role diversity training as a field has grown within the corporate structure of the United States, understand protective or anti-discriminatory United States legislation, how topics such as privilege and resistance create a hostile work environment for employees and
understanding the role race, gender and sexual identity have on an individual. The study utilizes multiple theoretical concepts as an overarching lens to view diversity, inclusion, and equity within the workforce.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

The problem of practice for this study is the lack of motivation for employees to participate in diversity-related professional development sessions. The purpose of this action research study was derived from an examination of how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives.

This study will examine the following research question:

1. Within corporate and education settings, how does a sampling of employees from various backgrounds perceive and react to the objectives, benefits, and efficacy of employer-sponsored diversity training programs?

**Literature Review Methodology and Organization**

The literature reviewed for this study consists of peer review articles, journals, books, and dissertations. This literature was found through multiple search engines using a keyword search which included: culturally relevant pedagogy, self-determination theory, motivation, autonomy, sexual identity and discrimination, diversity training, LGBTQ+, resistance, privilege, gender identity, culturally relevant teaching, intersectionality learning, learning retention theory, sexual education, corporate training, adult learning theory, adult education, and care ethics. Research for the literature review included the following databases: EBSCOhost, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Sage.
The literature was selected through a process of scanning, skimming, and mapping. These three tools were chosen to preview, select, and organize material (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

This chapter emphasizes the need for a culturally relevant pedagogy and adult educational practices within corporate instructional design procedures through understanding key themes and topics. Section one focuses on the epistemological position of the study. Section two identifies several theories that provide a frame to analyze the study. Section three contains a methodical examination of previous research and studies, divided into key themes to provide historical context and background.

Finally, section four presents a comparison and identification of gaps within the related literature. This section examines the literature's methodology, purpose, results, and limitations. Furthermore, an analysis of shared narratives demonstrates the areas in which this study will contribute to the previous research. By comparison, this section also examines the differences between previous research and this study. This comparison is made as a means to measure and understand gaps within the existing literature.

**Epistemological Positioning**

The social reconstructionist (SR) movement originally developed following World War I (WWI) and reached a high point of popularity by the 1930s (Stanley, 1992). The SR movement challenged that Dewey's progressivism epistemology did not go far enough in pressing for social change. Therefore, proponents of SR asserted that education should be the primary method for reinforcing the importance of the next generation acting as change agents for the betterment of society (Schiro, 2008; Stanley, 1992).
Ultimately, SR lies in the intersection of the educational environment's political, social, economic, and moral attitudes.

Emerging from WWI, prominent SR theorists argued that educational theories and practices were falling behind social change (Brameld, 1933; Counts, 1932; Rugg, 1931; Stanley, 1992). Specifically, the individuals at the most risk of falling behind were minority groups who were victims of discrimination and prejudice perpetrated by wealthy white males (Stanely, 1992). While each critical SR theorist had different degrees of radical change or methods of conducting change, the overall remained. The primary goal of SR is to remove detrimental characteristics or ideologies from one's culture (Schiro, 2008).

The SR movement continued throughout the mid-20th century when theorist Paulo Freire identified and championed education as a means for societal change away from oppression (Freire, 2000). In this identification, Freire (2000) believed that the oppressed must resist the oppression and, more importantly, not perpetuate the oppression onto others. Freire asserted that education and politics were inseparable; therefore, educational reform must coincide with political reform. The additional distinction of oppression versus the oppressed and the removal of oppressing others provided a fundamental shift and development within SR scholars.

Curriculum-based on social reconstruction emphasizes four key topics. First, culture is a byproduct of power (Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Since culture is represented by who wields power, it is logical that culture can change based on who has the power. Second, it organizes and constructs a curriculum based on diverse backgrounds and learning styles (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Third, students should
have the ability to examine the inequality and discrimination within their environment (Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). This first-hand examination allows the student to conceptualize and process this information through their personal experience. Finally, it reinforces that students need to act as change agents for society (Schiro, 2008).

Criticism of social reconstructionism states that the theory breeds indoctrinated, anti-capitalist political agents (Groenke, 2009). However, this critique can be argued only to be a byproduct of the Cold War McCarthyism era (Groenke, 2009). Secondly, some may argue that social reconstructionists are too idealistic to believe that a small group of students and teachers can bring about societal change (Groenke, 2009). Finally, placing the role of social change onto adolescents may be too big of a burden on them while dealing with other aspects of growing up (Groenke, 2009).

Overall, a social reconstructionist curriculum focuses on student experience and emphasizes that students themselves must become change agents for society (Counts, 1932; Groenke, 2009; Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; McKernan, 2013; Schiro, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Therefore, when examining a SR based curriculum, it is crucial to keep in mind that the material was designed with the audience and goal in mind. In the scope of this action research project, the goal of project is to examine the perceptions of learners and their willingness, excitement, and knowledge of DEI supportive curriculum. While some argue that social reconstructionism may come with some critiques, providing context as a larger puzzle piece is essential. Social reconstruction only comprises a single aspect of this study. The following section examines various theoretical perspectives to frame this study's problem of practice.

23
Theoretical Framework

Culturally speaking, sexual identity tends to be an enveloping term used to encompass gender identity, sexual preference, and sexual orientation (Duxbury, 2014). These terms may be used interchangeably, but it is important to note that they are inherently different and should be kept distinct. The key to understanding this rhetoric lies within a multi-perspective theoretical approach. Before analyzing why terminology is essential for effectively teaching a culturally responsive curriculum, one must understand what motivates people attain and retain knowledge. This theoretical framework is then further divided into two subsections. First, it spotlights the Ladson-Billings (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Second, it examines Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory (SDT). These two theories, combined with the epistemological positioning of social reconstructionism, provide a critical framework to ground the literature and provide vital context to the research.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995; 2014; 2021) first coined culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), and it is defined as a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 4). A culturally relevant curriculum consists of three main components, *student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical competence* (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014; 2021). All three components are equally important and must be present within a CRP.

Student learning represents the acquired knowledge and intellectual growth from the start to the end of the learning experience (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014; 2021).
Importantly, student learning does not equate to formal assessment scores. Historically, Ladson-Billings used the term *academic success* instead of student learning. Upon further reflection, the author used the alternative variation as academic success became synonymous with standardized testing.

Cultural competence is the context in which students use their culture and experience to apply meaning and relevance to the acquired information (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014; 2021). Additionally, cultural competence reinforces the role of the educator as a facilitator to help students learn about other cultures. An effective, culturally competent curriculum employs students' culture as a learning conduit.

Sociopolitical competence reinforces the importance of the ability to “apply, analyze, synthesize, and critique their environment and the problems they encounter in order to become successful members of society” (Ladson-Billings, 2021, pp. 6-7). The term critical consciousness may also be used interchangeably. The central premise of this element of CRP is the emphasis on problem-solving rather than memorization. Ladson-Billings (2021) asserts that a strong sociopolitical consciousness allows students to challenge cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions perpetuating social inequities.

Ladson-Billings (2021) asserts that CRP does not contain a checklist or specific technical approach. Instead, this pedagogy focuses on teachers as agents of change who can implement research and policy within and outside the classroom. CRP demonstrates applicability through theory and practice. Furthermore, CRP reinforces the importance of teachers looking inward and conducting research within their teaching environment. After examining the components of a culturally relevant curriculum, the next step would be to determine what motivates an individual to acquire knowledge.
Self-Determination Theory

The origin of SDT dates back to 1985, with the publication of *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. In this seminal work, the authors examine the psychological needs in motivation and thereby creating the purpose for self-determination. According to the authors, SDT provides the framework to understand the factors that drive individuals to act in a certain manner (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Essential to SDT is the examination of autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, in order to understand what and how an individual is driven, one must understand their motivation. More specifically it is critical to understand the three categories of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

Intrinsic motivation can be best described as “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). Motivation of this type leads individuals to focus on assimilation, mastery, and exploration as they view it is critical to social development and an enjoyable life. This method of motivation relies on the reward of the positive and enjoyable feeling created as result of the behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). Intrinsic motivation tends to be autonomous, and originating from oneself, rather than a controlled and deliberate action by a third-party.

Extrinsic motivation is the contrast of intrinsic, in that it represents the “performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcomes” or an external reward or punishment avoidance (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71). To further the separation, extrinsic motivation can either be internalized or externally regulated. This distinction
various based on the individual. Internalized extrinsic motivation represents to self-interest and self-controlling behavior. Whereas externally regulated extrinsic motivation is directly controlled by outside forces, such as rewards or punishment avoidance (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Amotivation on the other hand is the “state of lacking the intent to act”, or “either act or do not act at all or act without intent” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72). The driving factor behind an amotivated behavior is not valuing the activity, not feeling the competency necessary to complete the activity, or not expecting the activity to result in a desirable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). It is important to note, that not completing a task can still be considered amotivation, since it is the motivated nonaction or motivated oppositional behavior that triggers the inaction.

The core of SDT and motivation lies in the psychological phenomenon of human needs, or as Ryan and Deci (2017) explain, the “fundamental nutrients or supports that individuals must have to thrive” (p. 81). According to the authors, this basic need and essential need is critical to understanding the implications of behavior and action. It is through the examination of the necessary “nutrients” of human needs that the authors extrapolate the driving factors for psychological development thereby establishing the three components of SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Autonomy can be defined as the ability of individuals to make choices based on their own free will. This intrinsic motivation creates a positive reinforcement of completing an act or deed without the need to be pressured (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The driving motivation behind this psychological need would be the need for an individual to self-regulate their behavior, actions, and experience. It is important to note, that while
autonomy lies with the self-regulation, this regulation comes from a place of
voluntariness, rather than a sense of independence.

In relation to SDT, competence refers to the basic desire to feel a sense of
effectiveness and mastery of their environment and social context (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
Understanding the environmental context of competence is critical to examining the
driving motivational factors of an individual’s sense of competency. Deci and Ryan
credit their use and development of the word competence from the work of) who
originally coined the term in reference to what he called an effectance motivation or “an
organism’s capacity to interact effectively with its environment (p. 297). This
environment effectiveness has a fundamental significance to oneself. Therefore, in order
to achieve an effective level of competence, individuals must feel ownership of the
activities at which they succeed (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Relatedness refers to the social connections and a desire for belongingness within
or between a group or a group setting (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The desire of social
connectedness is a psychological need to feel a sense of acceptance and belongingness by
others. Regarding relatedness, this relationship presents an intrinsic and extrinsic
motivation. Meaning the sense of connected can be directly impact the sense of self, as
well as by others. Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2017) assert that autonomy and
relatedness are intrinsically connected with each other as “the fulfillment of each need is
intertwined with the fulfilment of the other” (p. 293).

After examining the theoretical framework that grounds this action research study,
the next section provides background on related research regarding the analysis and
implementation of a culturally relevant corporate training program.
Related Research

Considering the goal of this study is to understand the impact of a culturally competent diversity training program on employees and employers. It is essential to review previous diversity training studies. This section analyzes three critical topics for existing studies. This analysis is pivotal to understanding the existing research, the existing gaps, and where this study fits into the larger realm. First, provide an examination of privilege, resistance, and the gender construct and how these themes fit within the larger scope of diversity training. Second is an analysis of three studies targeting diversity training and its outcomes. Third, an exploration of whether diversity training yields profitability or productivity increases. Finally, this section concludes with a consideration of socio-religious objections to diversity training.

Privilege

Goodman (2001) states, "in any educational context, it is helpful to know your audience to understand with whom you're working (p. 13). Social identities and cultural domination are essential concepts for understanding oppression (Carbado, 1999; Goodman, 2001; Griffin et al., 2004). Within this framework, oppression allows for perpetuating domination through cultural, institutional, and individual means (Goodman, 2001). In this context, oppression, and domination act as self-fulfilling forces. Meaning one leads to the other, which strengthens the original.

Cultural, individual, and institutional domination create a systemic privileged group that reinforces and strengthens the behavior norm of society (Goodman, 2001). Cultural and individual domination reinforces the notion that one is superior to another intrinsically. Therefore, any attempt to reduce their standing is a direct threat (Israel et al.,
Institutional domination is a systemic construct that alters social consciousness (Goodman, 2001). Examples of this social consciousness are what society learns or, more specifically, what society does not learn, reinforcing the normalcy of the dominant group (Goodman, 2001). Privilege groups have the cultural and institutional power to enforce their particular view resulting in physical, psychological, economic, and legislative domination (Carbado, 1999; Goodman, 2001).

Johnson (1997) defines a systemic privilege group as “what makes something a privilege is the unequal way in which it is distributed and the effect it has on elevating some people over others” (p. 175). This unequal distribution can result in an underappreciation of rights and opportunities for the advantaged group (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 1997). Privilege takes many forms: race, gender, economic, sexual preference, able-bodied, and class (Goodman, 2001). In the context of this study, the intersection of race, gender, sexual identity, or preference is the focal point for the discussion of privilege.

Heterosexual privilege extends the ability to openly display, communicate, acknowledge, and publicly celebrate their relationships (Goodman, 2001). It is important to note; a privileged group is only defined as privileged in relation to the subordinate group (Fine, 2004; Goodman, 2001). Therefore, one may be in a racial and economically privileged group but in a disadvantaged group for sexual and gender identity. This distinction is a common tactic to dissuade individuals in an advantaged group from allying with disadvantaged groups (Goodman, 2001). Dissuading occurs through the promotion of superiority within one's own advantaged group. This promotion is done through the transmission of negative attitudes. Such as expressing concerns that
disadvantaged groups receive special treatment or benefit from extra rights (Goodman, 2001; Israel et al., 2017). Additionally, the perpetuation of derogatory speech from privileged groups to disadvantaged groups. Examples of derogatory speech include saying the negative speech was unimportant, should not be taken seriously, or just a joke (Israel et al., 2017).

A method to examine the interaction of intersectionality of social privilege within everyday life is analyzing a matrix of domination. According to Wade and Ferree (2019), a matrix of domination is “a structure in which multiple hierarchies intersect to create a pyramid of privilege, leaving on top only those people who are advantaged in every hierarchy” (p. 184). Considering this hierarchical pyramid, instead of examining various forms of oppression and discrimination separately, it is critical to view them as interconnected (Osman, 2019). The matrix of domination demonstrates that one marginalized group may be disadvantaged relative to one social group yet advantaged over another (Shields, 2008). For example, a White transgender lesbian female may be disadvantaged due to their deviation from the gender and sexual norm, yet relative to other lesbians, advantaged due to her racial privileges (Osman, 2019).

Understanding the role race, gender, and other social identities play in the matrix of domination is crucial to understanding the underrepresentation and marginalization of minority students within an educational curriculum. A 2016 study shows that 59% of White students achieve an associate degree, compared to 15% of Latinx students and 12% of Black students (Person et al., 2017). These statistics become even more staggering with the inclusion of the sample population in the data set. Nationwide, only 25% of White students begin their post-secondary education career at a community
college, compared to 50% of Latinx students and 33% of Black students (Person et al., 2017). Creating opportunities for networking, career development, camaraderie, identity development, and positive academic attitudes for racial minorities is crucial to developing a system that benefits their students (Person et al., 2017).

Concepts of privilege and privilege groups are crucial to understanding issues and the importance surrounding culturally responsive training programs. Some individuals may reject the notion that they are members of privileged groups, and they may also deny the importance of elevating disadvantaged groups. In these two examples, the members of the privileged groups are demonstrating resistance.

**Resistance**

Rejecting the notion that an individual is a member of a privileged group is a common occurrence. Being a privileged or dominant group does not intrinsically mean someone is a bad person or willingly and knowingly discriminates against disadvantaged groups (Goodman, 2001). Lazzarre (1996) refers to this method of oppression as “willful innocence” (p. 49). Meaning, those who perpetuate willful innocence are individuals who affirm that if the problem does not affect them, then the problem does not exist (Goodman, 2001; Lazzarre, 1996). By comparison, those who are unaware of their privilege may be so due to their seeming themselves associated as the norm (Goodman, 2001). Additionally, they may not view themselves as members of a dominant group; therefore, they would not be aware of their privilege (Goodman, 2001).

Resistance can be defined as refusing to acknowledge alternative ideas that deviate from the established social norm (Goodman, 2001). Performing an act of resistance is not synonymous with committing a prejudicial act. In this case, prejudice
refers to acts or beliefs towards a specific social group, whereas resistance refers to an individual’s openness to consider alternative perspectives (Goodman, 2001). Resistance occurs through sociopolitical or psychological means. The underlying causes and perpetuation of resistance are sociopolitical environmental factors or psychological perpetuations of a superior or inferior belief (Goodman, 200; Israel et al., 2017).

Communication is a critical technique for reducing resistance (Areccia et al., 2020; Goodman, 2001; Israel et al., 2017). An example demonstrating communication would be connecting individuals who demonstrate resistance and allowing them to connect with individuals of the non-dominant group. As previously described, individuals may not be aware of their privilege nor see how their act of resistance actively harms disadvantaged groups. Overcoming and preventing resistance is key to learning under the social reconstruction epistemology. Combining social reconstruction with Nodding's care theory, creating a caring and supportive education breeds an environment that encourages social change, thereby lowering resistance.

**Gender and Gender Non-Conformity**

Gender is a social construct; therefore, we view the world, our culture, and our environment through a gendered perspective (Denton, 2016; Forbes, 2014; Wade and Ferree, 2019). Gender norms take the shape of a binary concept, masculine or feminine. Any deviation from the binary can result in oppression, exclusion, marginalization, or discrimination. Yet gender is only a singular aspect of our social identity. Other elements include sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status, age, religion, disability, and body size (Wade and Ferree, 2019). Social identities represent a collection of individual identities that define the role and status of a person within the social environment (Terry
et al., 1999). Understanding the role gender plays in the context of power relations embedded within social identities is critical to examining the heteronormative gender binary standard.

Cisnormative refers to a system in which cisgender people are the established norm. The term cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity parallels the sex assigned at birth (Forbes, 2014; Hennessy and Bloomberg, 2020; Wade and Ferree, 2019). Whereas cisnormative focuses on the gender identity of individuals, heteronormativity emphasis that heterosexuality is an unmarked sexual orientation norm (Wade and Ferree, 2019). Finally, gender binary refers to the concept of an either-or designation of feminine or masculine (Wade and Ferree, 2019). Understanding these three terms is crucial to understanding how gender and sexual identity intersect with multiple social identities.

The intersectionality framework was first coined by feminist scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1991). Initially, this framework asserts that gender and race should not be treated as separate entities; instead, they should be considered intersecting facets of oppression, exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991; Morales et al., 2019). In the following years, feminist scholars further expanded this intersection to include multiple aspects of an individual’s social identity, such as socioeconomic status, sexuality, age, religious identity, and disability (Morales et al., 2019; Wade and Ferree, 2019).

Nonconformity within a cis-heteronormative gender binary system leads to the construction of labels. While labeling has advantages and disadvantages, it is a necessary aspect of the examination of LGBTQ+ students and their inclusion within an
intersectional curriculum. Labels provide an advantage in that there is a fundamental belief that everybody wants to see themselves represented and describe themselves in a manner that confirms social identities (Forbes, 2014). A disadvantage is that labels are often constructed because of nonconformity with social norms, thereby exacerbating their deviation from the norm (Forbes, 2014). Furthermore, when it comes to gender and sexual identity labels, they often are self-administered as that particular label more closely resembles how those individual views themselves (Forbes, 2014).

Blackburn and Pennell (2018) describe the dichotomous gender norm through a thought experiment delivered to high school students. In this experiment, the teacher tasked their students to complete a scavenger hunt. This assignment aimed to find two settings or situations in which gender or sexual identity may be taken for granted (Blackburn and Pennell, 2018). The majority of the completed assignments focused on a singular aspect of gender roles. For example, they included advertisements for male vs. female products, which adhere to gender stereotypes (Blackburn and Pennell, 2018). Others discussed the gendered aspects of weddings, bridesmaids, and groomsmen (Blackburn and Pennell, 2018). Only a few students focused on transgender people or sexual identity, but only in the context of marriage or dating (Blackburn and Pennell, 2018). This limitation shows the engrained heteronormative gendered binary aspects of society. Further discussions around sexual identity led to conversations about how heteronormativity also includes cisnormativity (Blackburn and Pennell, 2018).

Shields (2008) asserts that an intersectional approach to the gender binary often succumbs to the fallacy of driving the research perspective rather than as a theory that reinforces the research question. This criticism advises scholars to ask more quantitative
how questions rather than as a method of examining results (Shields, 2008). Moreover, this recommendation needs to be carefully implemented as an intersectional approach to gender binary is a revolutionary and transformative process that needs to be done in a meaningful and intentional manner (Shields, 2008). Finally, while intersectionality originates as a perspective, it is crucial that the data support the strategy rather than vice versa (Shields, 2008).

Persons, Dawson, Garcia, and Jones (2017) examine the pursuit of high education tendencies and motivations of men of color within a community college. According to the study, the main challenges of pursuing an education include finances, family, academic struggles, peer interaction, mental health issues, and learning disabilities (Person et al., 2017). In contrast, the primary motivators of attaining a higher education included the desire to have a better life, help others, and serve as a role model for others (Person et al., 2017).

Hennessy and Bloomberg (2020) affirm their belief in deconstructing the gender binary due to its disproportionate harmful impact on children during the first developmental stage (birth to six). Children begin to recognize the gender social construct and self-identity between the ages of three and five (Hennessy and Bloomberg, 2020). As children interact with their social environment, they mimic and conform to their surroundings, including rejecting their self-identity due to a lack of representation or a sense of taboo (Hennessy and Bloomberg, 2020). Creating and implementing an intersectional curriculum allows children to see themselves and others as the norm, regardless of their social identities. Including an LGBTQ+ representative curriculum allows cis-gendered heterosexual and LGBQT+ people to see each other as the norm
rather than conformists or nonconformists (Blackburn and Pennell, 2018; Forbes, 2014; Hennessy and Bloomberg, 2020; Wade and Ferree, 2019).

While data suggests the importance of an inclusive and representative environment, implementation proves to be a difficult challenge. The cis-heteronormative gender binary is a systemic social construct that requires significant, purposeful, and meaningful change. In order to challenge these established norms, all of society has to question and confront this standard.

Diversity Training and Learning Outcomes

King et al. (2010) examined an extensive list of existing literature to understand what they refer to as the growing divide between diversity education and diversity training. The authors assert that while education and training can be used synonymously, they differ in research and practice. In their research, the authors describe of a growing disconnect between diversity management educational resources and the skills employee’s report as a necessary for managing a diverse workplace. King et al. (2010) asserts that both fields utilize similar theories and principles; therefore, one should rely on the other to help advance both fields. Examples of overlaying theories and principles include: the emphasis on a needs assessment, a focus on competency development alongside skill and behavioral growth, and an emphasis on active learning.

While both fields utilize similar theories and principles, they do differ in best practices. For example, according to King et all. (2010), “a training framework underscores the need for careful analysis of the needs of participants, the importance of context and top-down and bottom-up influences, the benefits of focusing on skills and behaviors, and the importance of demonstration and practice” (p. 896). Whereas a
diversity educational model “highlights the need to address awareness, appreciation, and understanding of one’s personal attitudes and beliefs, as well as global and specific knowledge regarding diversity” (p. 897).

Central to the authors’ arguments is the claim that training programs move too rapidly from the comprehensive cognitive development stage to the skill development stage (King et al., 2010). Educators are taught to incorporate feedback into their curriculum; this is another area that trainers must adopt. Both fields must rely on personal development to increase their ability to deliver their material accurately, efficiently, and meaningfully (King et al., 2010). This study conducted a thorough examination of existing diversity training and diversity education literature to conclude how similar the two fields are yet diverging separately. Overall, King et al. (2010) conclude that both fields should rely on each other to share techniques and theories to improve the other.

Alhejji et al. (2016) similarly conducted a systemic literature review. By comparison, their literature review consisted of a much larger data set. Alhejji et al. (2016) examined 61 published papers from 48 journals intending to advance the field’s understanding of diversity training outcomes. The study focused on three perspectives, business, learning, and social justice. The research identified that training outcomes are heavily skewed toward enhancing employee knowledge (Alhejji et al., 2016). The authors conclude that a training curriculum that emphasizes all three perspectives increases positive behavioral skills, positive attitude changes, improved organizational performance, improved sales position performance, and increased customer satisfaction (Alhejji et al., 2016).
In 2017, Israel et al. conducted a study to examine the methods of how police officers react to LGBTQ+ diversity training. Israel et al. (2017) aimed to measure the resistance and receptiveness present within the training. The authors found no significant divergence from typical diversity training findings. The participants denied having bias, demonstrated disengagement or disinterest in the training, exhibited negative body language, and challenged the material (Israel et al., 2017). The participants most common form of resistance occurred through challenging the importance or seriousness of derogatory speech targeted toward LGBTQ+ people (Israel et al., 2017). For example, some participants asserted the belief that stereotypes were not harmful or negative as they only represented a form of entertainment, rather than a commentary on the individual. Furthermore, some of the participants equated the terms fag, faggot, or gay to stupidity or non-masculine, rather than a derogatory or negative term towards the LGBTQ+ community. A second example of the participants reluctance to challenge derogatory speech would be due to their fear or discomfort on intervening or imposing on free speech. Some participants further clarified that they would not intervene as a method of preventing escalation.

This study's sample consisted of interviews with 120 police officers before and after four separate training sessions. All participants were mandated to undergo the training, resulting in an introductory level of resistance (Israel et al., 2017). Inside the classroom, the officers questioned the real-world applicability for LGBTQ+ terminology. Additionally, they utilized the training as a method for seeking guidance on law enforcement practices rather than diversity outcomes. For example, one officer asked, “What would be your recommendations on communicating empathy when it’s borderline
between a hate crime and freedom of speech” (Israel et al., 2017, p. 212). Some officers struggled with maintaining the balance of empathy and support versus legal limits and victim expectations.

The study completed by Israel et al., (2017) sought to examine types of resistance and receptiveness of law enforcement officers during an LGBTQ+ focused diversity training course. Their studied mirrored themes included in other diversity training seminars, such as the denial of bias, disengagement from the material, challenged the material, and demonstrated negative non-verbal body language. Overall, the authors assert the importance of their study as a method of instructing future diversity educators on identification of common methods of resistance in order to prepare and respond.

Reviewing previous studies targeted toward LGBTQ+ diversity training is critical to understanding the limitations and holes within the field. While researching the study, a common theme of overcoming barriers became increasingly prevalent. Most studies included a small portion of addressing these barriers, while others focused entirely on the subject.

The central premise of work-based learning (WBL) centers on the union of practice and theory within the workplace rather than a classroom (Raelin, 2008). An advantage of WBL is an emphasis on metacognition within the learning paradigm. Metacognition can be defined as the awareness or understanding of one's own learning or thinking process. This metacognition is examined through the reinforcement of questioning the meaning and application behind the learned knowledge rather than a trivial basic understanding of the information.
According to Raelin (2008), WBL consists of three key elements. First, the emphasis is on acquired knowledge as a byproduct of action during the learning task. Second, knowledge construction and application are a product of group collaboration. Third, the "users demonstrate a learning-to-learn aptitude, which frees them to question underlying assumptions of practice" (Raelin, 2008, p. 2). Furthermore, WBL reinforces that prior knowledge is provisional, allowing new information to build upon the preexisting.

Raelin’s framework explains the role of work-based learning, which, combined with the intersection of modes of learning and forms of knowledge, creates an environment for workers and coworkers to engage each other in a multi-dimensional level of action (Raelin, 1997). His central theory builds upon the previous work of David Kolb’s learning style inventory, which analyzes learning into matrix-style learning characteristics (Kolb, 2015; Raelin, 1997). Raelin’s framework expands the existing matrices into a three-dimensional pyramid, allowing movement from one sector to the next. The object is divided into eight sides, each marking a different method of knowing.

The fundamental aspect of WBL includes a blend of explicit and tacit knowledge acquisition for individual learners as applied through the matrix of four learning characteristics: conceptualization, experimentation, experimentation, and reflection (Raelin, 1997; 2008). Explicit knowledge is defined as a "familiar codified form that is transmittable in formal, systematic language (p. 67). Conversely, tacit knowledge is unreportable and characterizes the physical action and participation of the learner. Simply, knowing that and knowing how represents tacit and explicit knowledge.
Conceptualization is the first learning type and correlates to the ability of learners to understand new information through the context of existing knowledge. The second learning type is experimentation, which is the action of applying conceptual information in order to contextualize it with existing knowledge. Experience represents the tacit knowledge acquired through first-hand experimentation. Finally, reflection “constitutes the ability to uncover and make explicit to oneself what one has planned, observed, or achieved in practice” (Raelin, 2008, p. 74).

The four key elements represent the acquired knowledge at the individual level. Raelin expanded upon Kolb's learning matrix to also include collective learning. The explicit and tacit knowledge acquisition for collective learning consists of four characteristics: applied science, action learning, action science, and community of practice (Raelin, 1997). Utilizing applied sciences means applying the scientific method to test and measure theoretical propositions. Action learning is defined as “becoming a practitioner, not learning about practice” (Raelin, 1997, p. 569). Whereas applied science applies the scientific method to a theory, action science manifests it and tests it in a physical space. Community of practice marks a collaborative effort amongst individuals to learn together.

This framework does not have a set sequence for completion nor a guided path. Instead, the premise of this theory is to allow the applicability to be decided on multiple different conditions, such as “the readiness level of the learners, the strengths and preferences of the facilitator(s), or the past practices of the sponsoring unit or organization” (Raelin, 1997, p. 575). This three-dimensional framework applies to both adult and youth learners, and each of these demographics can be placed through this
template to measure work-based learning. Applying these work-based learning models to culturally responsive training demonstrates that knowledge and practice work optimally when used together (Avery & Thomas, 2004; Bezruková et al., 2016; Kolb, 2015; Raelin, 1997).

Raelin's framework emphasizes the importance of understanding the learner's readiness level before applying the matrix's tacit portions (1997). If the student is unaware of the importance of specific topics or ideas, then physical actions, individually and collaboratively, increase their chances of developing or perpetuating psychological barriers (Raelin, 1997). For example, an instructor could begin a lecture on educational leadership by having their students analyze a specific area of study within educational leadership. The beginning stages should be kept solely at the theoretical level. Then upon understanding the theories, the instructor should encourage their students to begin experimenting with the theories discussed in the classroom and apply it in their professional setting. After that, the next stage would be to discuss how the individual student’s perspectives between the theoretical and the introspective. Moving forward, all new theories and concepts should be applied and tested against the original theory in conjunction with the learner’s personal perspective. Raelin (1997) reinforces the importance of keeping discussions at the theoretical level before applying an introspective analysis of shared practices allows for mitigating risks.

While some may struggle with contextualizing the training, others may understand the material more rapidly. Therefore, it may be beneficial to allow a collaborative effort amongst a small group to work together to help each other in a dialogic manner (Raelin, 1997). This collaboration can allow someone to see a first-hand
application of the theoretical application while at the same time allowing someone who
has a firm understanding of the theory to act upon their beliefs (Raelin, 1997).

Understanding one’s audience and where each student fits within regarding their
comprehension of the material is key to successfully implementing Raelin’s framework.
One individual may be struggling to comprehend, while another is mastering the material
more quickly. Therefore, the final piece to this theory is an understanding of the role of
the teacher. The model requires a precise and coordinated application from initial
conception to execution (Raelin, 1997). Consequently, the results will mirror the
educator. That being, poor results are due to a weak facilitator. Or positive results due to a
strong teacher. Preparedness and fluid anticipation of events create an environment that
allows the teacher and the students to succeed.

The following section identifies barriers and the importance of overcoming them
to achieve a more inclusive and equitable workforce. The subsequent study emphasizes
the positive outcomes of implementing a CRP through a direct example of profitability
and productivity increase.

**Profitability and Productivity Increase**

Pichler et al. (2018) piloted a study to determine the impact LGBTQ+ supportive
policies had on a company. This study utilized a mixed methodology approach of
literature review, quantitative data collection, and apply results through a theoretical
framework. The authors inquired whether the existing research that connects a positive
correlation between recruitment and retention of employees with a corporation that
practices LGBTQ+ supportive policies extends to profitability increases. Pichler et al.
(2018) applied corporate social responsibility theory to 26,243 data points and ultimately
determined a positive relationship between LGBTQ+ supportive policies and corporate productivity and profitability increase. The authors concluded three crucial findings to support their claim. First, LGBTQ+-supportive policies are associated with higher firm value, productivity, and profitability (Pichler et al., 2018). Second, the firm-value profitability benefits are only associated with companies engaged in research and development (Pichler et al., 2018). Third, the firm-value increase is only present if the corporation resides within a state with existing anti-discrimination laws targeted toward LGBTQ+ people (Pichler et al., 2018). The authors posit that since the existing data support a positive relationship between recruitment and employee retention and profitability increase, the inverse is also true (Pichler et al., 2018). That inverse is the existence of a negative relationship if a company discontinues LGBTQ+ supportive practices (Pichler et al., 2018).

Gagne and Deci (2005) assert that if an organization emphasizes the basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), then this promotion will yield a direct increase to employee intrinsic motivation while simultaneously reducing the need for extrinsic motivation. According to the authors, this increase of intrinsic motivation will result in six different outcomes that promote workplace efficiency. Gagne and Deci (2005) describe the six outcomes as,

1) persistence and maintained behavior change; (2) effective performance, particularly on tasks requiring creativity, cognitive flexibility, and conceptual understanding; (3) job satisfaction; (4) positive work-related attitudes; (5) organizational citizenship behaviors; and (6) psychological adjustment and well-being (p. 337).
Furthermore, as described by Gagne and Deci (2005), facilitation for autonomy falls within two general categories:

(1) specific factors in the social context, such as choice and meaningful positive feedback, which can be thought of as being analogous to specific aspects of job contents and contexts; and (2) the interpersonal ambience, which can be thought of as being analogous to the organizational climate and managers’ interpersonal styles. (p. 339).

The authors conclude the existence of a positive correlation between productivity and a work environment that is conducive to the three psychological needs.

Additionally, the authors found a direct positive correlation between employee satisfaction of their employer’s promotion of their three psychological needs and their work-life balance satisfaction, along with a positive correlation with increased performance (Gagne & Deci, 2005). They state, “autonomous work motivation is facilitated by environments in which jobs are interesting, challenging, and allow choice and in which the work climate is autonomy supportive” (Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 354). In addition to the understanding the psychological needs of employees, examining the type of environment in which the employees feel motivated to learn is crucial.

According to Noddings (2013), care ethics does not equal caring or caregiving, nor does it perpetuate a feminine attitude. Care ethics is a genderless tone. Noddings (2013) emphasizes that changing the tone is an “invitation to dialogue and not a challenge to enter a battle” (p. 6). This invitation refers to creating a welcoming learning environment for students and teachers. Noddings (2012, 2013) asserts that this positive environment allows for the optimal learning experience.
Five central themes or techniques to develop and implement care ethics into teaching include *listening, critical thinking, dialogue, making thoughtful connections*, and *reflective response* (Noddings, 2012). Listening shows attentiveness, signifying the audience's understanding of their problems. Demonstrating exemplary critical thinking, establishing inclusive dialogue, and making thoughtful responses promote an intellectual and practical environment for both learners and educators (Noddings, 2012, 2013). Finally, through reflective responses, one can display to another that they are caring. Receptive responses and listening are arguably the most vital techniques to incorporate care ethics. These techniques reinforce the importance of understanding opposing viewpoints and bring an intellectual challenge to education (Noddings, 2012). Using receptive listening facilitates the importance of seeing two sides and reinforces a desire to research rather than rely on one's viewpoint. While these themes are connected to care ethics, it is essential to note that one can exhibit only some of the five, and any of them in a particular order, to achieve moral education. Furthermore, Noddings (1999, 2012, 2013) asserts that these are not fully fleshed action plans, and instead, they illustrate a variety of approaches educators can present and reliably use.

Understanding caring and care ethics are fundamental to translating theory into moral education theory. Noddings (2013) posits that “de-professionalizing education” would be a pivotal step toward shaping the United States educational system into a moral, caring educational practice (197). The goal of this movement is not to decrease the quality or professionalism, but have teachers act more as parents. Maintaining a high-quality standard of educators can be accomplished through two measures, measurement of field expertise and inclusion (Noddings, 1999; 2012; 2013). Through this duality of
expertise and inclusion caring, educators act as caregivers rather than merely enforcers of knowledge.

A core tenet of care ethics is the emphasis on inclusion. In this case, inclusion does not strictly mean diversity or equitable inclusion. Instead, it is an all-encompassing spectrum that brings outside material inward. For example, an inclusive, caring, competent curriculum for chemistry should be more than just teaching the subject. In addition, it should insert intersectional concepts of race, gender, history, politics, and philosophy (Noddings, 1999, 2012). This inclusive curriculum allows the educator and students to receive various topics demonstrating the importance of subjects. Noddings (2012) challenges the belief in the importance of test scores and grade point average (GPA) as a measurement of education. This reliance goes against the fundamental ideas of care ethics.

Caring is a fundamental step towards a moral, educational system. The act of caring may be a simple concept, but one that may be overlooked. In addition, caring is not strictly a feminine or anti-masculine theory. Care ethics does not distinguish between genders, nor does it assume the act of caregiving is a feminine concept. Moral education and understanding self-identity and learning theories provide a theoretical overview of the importance and theoretical background for researching culturally relevant teaching. While this section focuses on the positives associated with overcoming barriers to diversity training programs, the following section identifies the potential issues with implementing such a plan.
Religious Objection

Kaplan (2006) utilized a qualitative analysis of three lawsuits directed toward corporations that infringed on their employee's religious freedom rights. The author aimed to examine a negative relationship between employees and employers who utilize an LGBTQ+ supportive training program (Kaplan, 2006). This study is significant because it emphasizes analyzing how employers balance the importance of providing adequate support for LGBTQ+ employees and adhering to and respecting other employees' religious freedoms. The three chosen court cases were Altman v. Minnesota Department of Corrections (2001), Peterson v. Hewlett-Packard Company (2004), and Williams v. Kaiser Permanente Div. of Research (2000). Kaplan concluded that the court cases were separated into four questions. First, what was the level of participation? Specifically, what was the mandatory level, and were the employees given an opt-out option (Kaplan, 2006)? Second, to what degree was the training content and the divergence from the typical training (Kaplan, 2006)? Third, employee reactions: Did the employees present their discomfort or grief to their respective employers (Kaplan, 2006)? Finally, how did the employer handle the training and reported discomfort (Kaplan, 2006)? The study concluded that LGBTQ+ training providers should include reasonable accommodation for religious objectors (Kaplan, 2006). Additionally, managers must articulate why LGBTQ+ diversity is essential to the organization (Kaplan, 2006).

Research shows that employers are moving too rapidly through training material, focusing on skill and knowledge development rather than comprehension (Alhejji et al., 2016; King et al., 2010). This rapid movement, especially regarding material some may deem controversial, reinforces preconceived bias (Israel et al., 2017). While the previous
research demonstrates this issue, it also reinforces the importance and benefits of developing training programs with cultural competency in mind. Productivity and happiness increase, which yields more profitable employment is evident after creating such a training policy (Pichler et al., 2018). While it is crucial to consider LGBTQ+ people, it is important to provide a religious opt-out option (Kaplan, 2006). Diversity training programs need to be aware of all sides, not just the specific ones they target.

**Chapter Summary**

As previously stated, the problem of practice for this study is the lack of motivation for employees to participate in diversity-related professional development sessions. The topic of labeling is a sensitive and controversial issue with numerous implications. Therefore, one must avoid creating negative implications by establishing labels. This goal can be accomplished by applying a social reconstructionist ideology to a curriculum that focuses on student experience and emphasizes that students themselves must become change agents for society.

Social reconstructionism combined with the theoretical and practical application of CRP and SDT learning models of motivation with diversity training curriculum demonstrates that autonomy, competency, and relatedness are all intrinsically connected. Understanding social reconstructionism, CRP, SDT, and related research are crucial to the background context for this study. Therefore, this study aims to examine how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives. The next chapter will present the methodology of the study.
Chapter 3
Research Methods and Design

This qualitative action research case study examines the challenges and issues minority employees face regarding race, gender, and sexual identity discrimination and underrepresentation. This study focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues within corporate and academic training curricula. I desired to investigate how receptive and motivated individuals were to employer-mandated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. When constructing or enacting a diversity-related curriculum, it is crucial to consider factors that could potentially lead to resistance.

Overview of Chapter

Chapter three focuses on research design and methodologies. Followed by the problem of practice and research questions, the rationale for the selected research methodology, a description of the research design, the researcher's role, and the research's setting. This chapter provides information pertaining to the recruitment and demographics of participants of the study, such as the number of participants and their characteristics. Additionally, data collection methods related to measures, instruments, and tools are discussed in this chapter. Research procedures and protocols for interviews are detailed in the following sections of the chapter. Finally, this chapter reviewed the process and overview of data analysis gathered from the interviews.
Problem of Practice

The problem of practice for this study is the lack of motivation for employees to participate in diversity-related professional development sessions. The purpose of this action research study was derived from an examination of how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives.

This study examined the following research question:

1. Within corporate and education settings, how does a sampling of employees from various backgrounds perceive and react to the objectives, benefits, and efficacy of employer-sponsored diversity training programs?

Research Design

This qualitative research study explored employees' motivational needs, desires, perspectives, and reactions in response to employer-sponsored diversity training programs. Qualitative research is a method of viewing and understanding how individuals make sense of their world (Davis, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Upton, 2020). A qualitative action research case study design was used as the primary research paradigm due to the study’s emphasis on human society and culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative research design emphasizing anonymized interviews allows participants to share their knowledge and practices in a safe and welcoming environment. Overall, this qualitative research study examined employees' motivational needs, desires, perspectives, and reactions to participate in employer-sponsored diversity training programs, which can only be measured qualitatively.
The Rationale of Research Design

The primary goal of action research is for practitioners to find effective solutions to practice-based problems in the identified problem of practice (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, I aimed to identify and examine various employees' perspectives and reactions regarding employer-sponsored diversity training programs' objectives, benefits, and efficacy. Furthermore, this research study aimed to understand the underlying themes of motivation, resistance, and learning acquisition of employees participating in corporate-sponsored diversity professional development. The secondary goal of action research is to actively engage participants at some point in the research process in order to understand how they interpret and solve the problem in their workplace.

Practitioners of action research tend to be more familiar with their research topics because of their insider positionality (Efron & Ravid, 2020; Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the case of this action research study, my experience as an instructional designer and as a learner allowed me to witness first-hand the motivational levels and participation rates among corporate employees while also having a deeper understanding of the issue, thereby fully committing to the research topic. A qualitative action research case study was the appropriate method for this study because the overall purpose of qualitative research aligns with the goal of understanding how individuals interpret their experiences, construct their social environment, and provide meaning to their lived experiences (Meriam & Tisdel, 2016).

A qualitative action research case study was the optimal choice for addressing this research study’s identified problem of practice due to its emphasis on examining the experience and interpretation of employees' perspectives and reactions toward
institutional objectives achieved through diversity-related training content. Meriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that a case study design “is well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (p. 28). Considering the intense sensitivity, controversy, and significance of discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, a case study was the appropriate research design paradigm.

**Research Setting**

When I first began writing this dissertation, I worked for a different organization, a workforce development non-profit that operates in most major cities throughout the United States. I would have frequent one-on-one professional development meetings with my operations director during my employment at that institution. In these meetings, we regularly discussed my research topic and how this study could contribute to their institutional objectives for employee upskilling.

While I ultimately transitioned into a new position at another organization, I remained in contact with my former supervisor. As I approached this project's recruitment phase and recalled my former director's willingness to allow me to recruit employees, I scheduled a call to discuss this option. After informing him of the basis for this dissertation, the volunteer's time requirements, and their ability to withdraw at any time while also reinforcing the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, he permitted me to recruit individuals from his organization, pending that everything was conducted outside of company time.

All participants were to be unpaid volunteers who were provided the option to withdraw their involvement at any time during the interview process. This qualitative research study was conducted virtually through Zoom conferences, phone conversations,
and email correspondence. The following subsections provide the context for the research participants and the role of the researcher.

**Research Participants**

After the initial call with my former manager, I scheduled a 30-minute virtual conference consultation, emailed him a recruitment letter (see Appendix B), and requested that he distribute the invitation and meeting invitation to his staff. This meeting and recruitment letter aimed to inform interested volunteers of my research topic and shared the overall goal of examining employee motivation, perceptions, and reactions toward diversity training. The email invitation also assured participants they could withdraw from the research study at any time and instructed them to contact me if interested in volunteering. The introductory meeting reiterated again the importance of confidentiality and anonymity. This call was attended by three individuals, one in my local office and two virtual employees who lived in other states. During the call, I approached the subject of passing the email invitation to other individuals in their professional network. This snowball sampling strategy encouraged the current participants to refer individuals they knew who might be interested in participating in the study.

This snowball sampling approach utilized the same recruitment letter and instructions to contact me if interested in participating and the request to further distribute the email invite to other members in their professional network. A population consisting of 10 individuals was the intended sample size for this research study. Although, if more than 10 individuals responded to the initial recruitment invite, I planned to choose 10 participants through a deliberate selection process that would yield a diverse sample
population. Achieving the desired sample population was an important target, as that allowed for individuals to drop out of the study while maintaining a suitable sample size.

This sampling method continued throughout a one-month period, at which point the recruitment phase ended. This recruitment strategy provided a diverse participant group that fell into two divergent categories: those from an academic setting and those from a corporate setting. The term academic setting was used as a categorization method to refer to participants who served as professional teachers or school administrators. Considering this research study’s goal of examining employee motivations, perceptions, and reactions to diversity training programs, rather than examining a specific organization’s employer-sponsored diversity activities, the snowball sampling strategy provided an excellent resource to generate 2nd, 3rd, and 4th level participants. This research method acted as a way of removing my bias as this recruitment strategy generated volunteers who did not participate in a diversity course that I designed or instructed. Overall, the majority of those who volunteered to participate in this research project were recruited through snowball sampling. Therefore, they did not have any direct connection with me or the training material I created.

Ten individuals agreed to participate in the study during the recruitment phase, but two participants had to drop out during the data collection phase due to personal conflicts. This focus group was comprised of diverse backgrounds, ages, and professional experience. Of the sample population, six participants identified as female (75%), and two identified as male (25%). Five participants stated their racial identity as White or Caucasian, which equated to 62.5% of the sample population. Two participants, or 25%,
identified as Hispanic or Latina; both were born outside of the United States and immigrated as children. One individual identified as African American.

Additionally, one participant identified his sexual orientation as homosexual. All individuals (100%) self-identified as cisgender. Religious and economic diversity was not considered during the initial recruitment phase, but some individuals disclosed this information during the interview. All participants named in this study were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. I describe the research participants in-depth and provide their pseudonyms in Chapter 4.

The participants of this qualitative action research case study comprised both a purposeful sample and a sample of convenience (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participant group is considered a purposeful sample because the volunteers were deliberately selected due to their previous involvement in corporate-sponsored training activities, either through my former organization or through a snowball sampling strategy of incorporating outside institutions. Meriam and Tisdell (2016) define snowball sampling as “perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling” (p. 98). Additionally, all participants had prior diversity training experience either as an instructor or as a participant in an employer-sponsored DEI program. The participants were selected purposefully so that the population could include individuals from various regions across the United States, seniority levels, professional fields, and social demographics. This study utilized a sample of convenience strategy due to availability and overall interest expressed by respondents.
Role of the Researcher

Considering my position, I have an insider and outsider perspective in this action research study. As a corporate instructional designer, I construct training curriculums for external and internal employees. Besides my formal experience in the private sector, I also acted as a consultant to develop multiple learning management systems and to modernize existing corporate training programs. This first-hand account of the backend training material and a personal account of speaking with coworkers identified the gap existing within existing corporate diversity training programs. While my experience as a curriculum designer gave me a greater understanding of the research topic. My experience participating in and observing corporate training activities helped me to remain objective and analyze the data from an insider perspective. Furthermore, considering the population consisted of few curriculum developers, my background provided an additional source of outsider positionality.

While I utilized an insider positionality for the overall research study, an outsider perspective was also applied throughout the data collection process. Due to the diverse nature of the participants, their experiences, careers, perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes did not always coincide with those of my own. Additionally, considering my career as an instructional designer and my history of creating and delivering diversity training content, which differs from all research participants, I operated primarily as an outsider throughout the interview process. This outsider perspective allowed me to ask follow-up questions due to the unfamiliarity and curiosity generated as an outsider (Kee et al., 2001).
Insider positionality refers to the researcher’s self-acknowledged socio-cultural identity being shared or aligned with the participant group (Chavez, 2008). Regarding this research study, my insider positionality is connected with the identity of being a working professional who incorporates aspects of their socio-cultural identity into their career. Regarding the outsider positionality, all participants in this research study comprised diverse backgrounds, ages, and professional experience. Therefore, when conducting this study, there were aspects where the researcher did not share a similar socio-cultural identity and perspective as some participants.

While I served as an outsider throughout the interview process, I utilized an insider position for data analysis and reflection purposes. While examining and coding the data, I reflected on stories of my own experiences participating in employer-sponsored diversity training. Additionally, I utilized my insider perspective to reflect on my experiences navigating social identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must accommodate and placate to maintain institutional objectives. Stories and examples described by the participants create a shared experience for both me and the interviewees. This insider-outsider perspective allowed me to create a strong initial connection and rapport with the participants. According to Chavez (2008), insider positionality allows for a greater revelation of truth and discovery through alternative forms of discussion and interview structure.

When conducting a qualitative case study examining corporate training curricula and the acknowledgment of intersectional identities, issues of suspicion may occur. This non-compliance can occur through a power imbalance between the researcher and the participant. This power discrepancy coincides with an insider-outsider positionality,
although this dynamic can exist between insider-insider research (Call-Cummings et al., 2019). Understanding power dynamics is crucial when choosing the type of data to collect in a qualitative research project (Call-Cummings et al., 2019; McClure & McNaughtan, 2021).

**Research procedure**

This qualitative research study utilized interviews as the primary data collection sources. Interviews were selected as the primary method due to the methodology of discovering and gathering insightful data relevant to this study’s problem of practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data collection methods should complement and grow with a qualitative research project. Integrating interviews as a primary research tool allows a qualitative study to create a holistic picture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Surveys**

This study utilized surveys in one distinct way: as a means for data collection purposes. The initial utilization of surveys provided a method of recruitment. As stated in the setting and participants section, a survey was created to gauge initial interest and collect information for participants within the study. All surveys were hosted and created through the platform Google Forms. Surveys play a crucial role in the collection of answers for open-ended reflection questions, which help to gain a more in-depth understanding of participants' knowledge of cultural competence, institutional bias, and issues concerning minority groups. This action research study utilized surveys strictly from recruitment and surface-level preparation work to learn more about the participants before the interviews. The survey allowed for a shared connection to form prior to conversations.
Interviews

This qualitative case study utilized interviews as the primary data collection sources. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) refer to interviews as conversations with an intended outcome seeking specific information. Interviews were used as guided conversations to explore and understand participant's interpretations, perspectives, prior knowledge, and experience regarding this study's research topic. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the qualitative interview should be structured and guided by open-ended questions. It took approximately one hour to complete each interview. Interviews were conducted using one of three methods: virtual camera on, camera off, or via phone. 4/8 (50%) of the participants preferred the camera on. 3/8 (38%) of the participants selected the via phone option. Only one participant preferred the virtual camera-off method of interview. Only one interview for each of the participants was required for this study, although the researcher expressed to each participant the availability for any follow-up interviews.

This data collection method was implemented due to the qualitative aspects of this research study. Semi-structured interviews are the ideal data collection method for this qualitative research study, which utilizes an ethnographic case study research paradigm (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview questionnaire consists of 11 central research questions and 17 sub-questions that help facilitate probing opportunities (see Appendix C).

The semi-structured interview utilized the virtual conferencing tool's ability to record and transcribe the discussion. In addition, the researcher conducted each interview with a pen, paper, and secondary recording method. All the tools were used to build
redundancy and validity to the results by recording all available data. Following each interview, all participants received an encrypted email containing copies of the interview recordings, transcripts, and field notes. All data from the open-ended surveys and video and audio recordings from the interviews were collected and stored electronically on my personal password-protected laptop.

The post-study interviews strived to meet three objectives. The first objective was to understand how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields. The second objective was to examine employee motivation and the efficacy of employer-sponsored diversity training programs. Finally, the third objective sought to understand employee perspectives and reactions toward the benefits and objectives of employer-sponsored diversity training programs.

Procedure

A seven-week qualitative research period was used in this study. Furthermore, this study is categorized into four key phases. The organizational agenda of the research procedure is discussed below.

Phase 1

Phase 1 was the “pre-planning phase.” During the pre-planning phase, the overall objective was to create surveys, interview questionnaires, consent forms, and all required documents. During this phase, I communicated with my former organization's director and human resource manager. The conversation focused on gathering the names and contact information of potentially interested participants who either previously reported frustrations or a sense of fulfillment through the corporate-sponsored diversity training programs. This phase was expected to be the longest of the four.
Phase 2

During phase 2, the focus was on the disbursement of the recruitment survey to grow the suitable sample population. After receiving an initial list of contact information, I followed up through an email correspondence inviting the potential candidates to volunteer to participate in this action research study. After the initial contact, a snowball sampling strategy was implemented to gather more participants. This snowball sampling strategy encouraged the current participants to refer individuals they know who might be interested in participating in the study. Additionally, during this phase, each participant was encouraged to select their pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Some participants choose not to select their own pseudonyms; in this case, the research provided one for them. The recruitment phase was expected to take around one month. This duration allowed for an adequate recruitment duration and snowball sampling.

Phase 3

During this phase, the overall objective was dedicated solely to the interview timeframe for the participants. Interviews were conducted using one of three methods: virtual camera on, virtual camera off, or via phone. Considering that all interviews were conducted virtually, this method allowed for an option to include digital transcription and digital record-keeping within the data collection phase. Phase 3 occurred over the span of three weeks.

Phase 4

This phase included an inductive analysis of the theory compared to the collected data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that the "process of data collection and analysis is
recursive and dynamic" (p. 195). Therefore, once the first three phases of the study are completed, the fourth and final phase will be the data analysis portion of the research project. The objective of the study was to conduct simultaneous data collection and analysis. Considering collection is an ongoing process, this process can extend indefinitely (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, a robust management system was established before the study began. The management system utilized for pre-data analysis consisted of three key components. First, the transformation of data into readable text. Second, the sorting of the data into individual files. Finally, create a data file organizer in order to access the files quickly.

Each interview was recorded for record-keeping purposes and transcribed for future reference. This record allowed the interview or specific sections to be categorized as they relate to this study’s research questions. Each transcription was coded with a particular phrase or categorization based on theme and narrative inquiries. This method was selected to create a quick reference phrase or symbol to allow the researcher to group, reference, and categorize the relevant data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Considering the objectives of the study, all data was coded through the use of a thematic analysis.

During the data analysis phase, I used the following four steps procedure to code and analyze the interview data: identify categories and themes using Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination theoretical framework, separate the data accordingly, organize the data into the predetermined categories, and record the categories (Adu, 2019; Efron & Ravid, 2020; Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of coding is to give meaning to the raw qualitative data and transform the data into categories and themes relevant to theory
and research (Adu, 2019). Throughout the entire coding process, I utilized a thematic analysis strategy group with similar participant narratives and themes. This thematic analysis was applied through the lens of Deci & Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT). Therefore, the three main categories were sorted based on the three components of SDT: competency, autonomy, and relatedness. In order to catalog the data, I utilized a dual methodology for organizing and categorizing the data. First, I utilized a description-focused coding strategy, where I grouped similar themes and ideas and wrote a short summary or description presented by the participant's narrative. Second, I utilized an interpretation-focused coding strategy, where the goal was to provide meaning and interpretation for what the participants described as they shared their lived experiences. This interpretation was consistently cross-examined against my bias regarding the research topic.

The research question was answered when the researcher reflected on and synthesized the collected data. This case study aimed to investigate the motivational needs, desires, perspectives, and reactions for employees to participate in employer-sponsored diversity training programs through the analysis of the interview data.

**Ethical Consideration**

Considering this study utilized a qualitative method with a case study design as the primary research paradigm combined with the study's emphasis on human society and culture results in the necessity to maintain ethical decision-making to maintain validity and confidentiality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this study included deliberate measures to maintain the study's validity and the data collected. Additionally, due to the human element included in the study, the researcher took protective measures to keep the
confidentiality of the participants throughout the study. This ethical consideration occurred through the reinforcement of validity, anonymity, confidentiality, and permission to conduct research.

Validity

When conducting a qualitative action research study, validity, reliability, and trustworthiness must be considered throughout the project. Creswell and Miller (2000) describe that one of the challenges of maintaining validity occurs by determining the length of the study and questioning whether the research gathered adequate data. An extensive literature review preceded the writing of surveys, interviews, and questionnaires to provide content validity. The literature review additionally offered historical context to the existing problem and provided the necessary background to begin researching contemporary understanding of concepts of cultural responsiveness, intersectionality, institutional bias, racial discrimination, heteronormativity, self-identity, implicit bias, and religious exemption.

This action research study utilized three different methods to ensure the validity of this research. First, the participants were able to tell their stories and lived experiences in their own words. This validity method allows the reader to immerse themselves into the participant's lives and provide a first-hand account of their perspective. Second, I shared the digital transcripts with the participants as a member-checking strategy. Through this strategy, the participants were able to confirm the accuracy of their narratives, experiences, and perspectives. Finally, each phase of this study underwent a cross-examination of my positionality. This reflexivity was conducted to consider bias, assumptions, and personal experiences that can affect analyses (Merriam & Tisdell,
2016). This validity method was enacted to provide an example of how the researcher's personal ideals and intentions influence the study. I maintained objectivity by acknowledging my own bias regarding this research topic.

**Full and Informed Consent and Confidentiality**

During phases 1 and 2, I constructed and delivered consent forms to all participants. Upon finalization of the sample population, each participant was encouraged to select their own pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Some participants choose not to select their own pseudonyms; in this case, the research provided one for them. The sample population consisted entirely of individuals over the age of 18; therefore, parental or guardian consent forms were not necessary.

**Participant Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Maintaining participant confidentiality and anonymity was crucial throughout this action research project. Therefore, in order to ensure the confidentiality and security of participant information, I maintained rigorous standards throughout the research study. First, all data from surveys, interviews, audio recordings, and email correspondence were collected and stored on my personal password-protected laptop. All participants were given a generalized location, industry, and pseudonym in order to ensure honesty, privacy, and transparency during the data collection and analysis phase. All participants were unpaid volunteers who were provided the option to withdraw their participation at any time during the interview process. Additionally, in order to maintain validity and reinforce ethical considerations, all participants were encouraged to inform the researcher if they wanted to skip a question based on their comfort with the subject. All participants were over the age of 18 and gave consent prior to their interview.
Permission to Conduct Research

Before conducting any research, the researcher received IRB approval from the University of South Carolina (see Appendix A).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provides information related to the methodology and methods of this qualitative action research study. This chapter focused on the research design and methodologies, the researcher's roles, and the research setting. This chapter also provided information pertaining to the recruitment and demographics of participants of the study, such as the number of participants and their characteristics. Additionally, this chapter discussed the data collection methods related to measures, instruments, and tools are discussed in this chapter, as well as reviewed the process and overview of data analysis gathered from the interviews. The next chapter will present the results and findings of the study.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

This action research study explores employee perception, understanding, receptiveness, and experience navigating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the corporate workforce. A common criticism of diversity training courses is the tendency to focus on analyzing specific diversity training outcomes rather than understanding the underlying reasons for resistance and receptiveness (Israel et al., 2017). Considering the diverse socio-cultural identities of the workforce, when analyzing an organization’s susceptibility to institutional bias, one must understand all social identities of individuals and how their social identities influence their environment.

The problem of practice for this study is the lack of motivation for employees to participate in diversity-related professional development sessions. The purpose of this action research study was derived from an examination of how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives.

This study examined the following question:

1. Within corporate and education settings, how does a sampling of employees from various backgrounds perceive and react to the objectives, benefits, and efficacy of employer-sponsored diversity training programs?
Research Strategy

A qualitative thematic analysis approach was employed for the study. This research method was selected due to the researcher’s desired goal of addressing a current issue, understanding the targeted population through in-depth conversations, and improving the current practice of diversity training within the researcher’s organization. One-on-one interviews served as the primary method of data collection for this study as a way to discover participants’ perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds on DEI training objectives.

Before conducting any research, the researcher received IRB approval from the University of South Carolina. An invitation letter and a survey for available times were sent to each participant prior to the interview. This chapter will examine the findings of the study, including the three emergent themes and the interpretation of results.

This chapter provides the study findings through the analysis and organization of the data through the lens of this research study’s theoretical framework, primarily through self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory focuses on the motivation of humans and how their motivation is supported by positive senses of autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Ladson-Billings culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach to educating that reinforces teachers as decisionmakers and scholars who are the ones able to translate research and knowledge onto learners. While this educational theory is applicable to the corporate sector, Ladson-Billings primary goal of assisting academic-based individuals to see a path forward. Her principles demonstrate a path forward, employers need to think about learning, and cultural differences, and always
with an eye out for equity and social justice. Therefore, CRP will provide a further
guidance as an implication for future recommendations in Chapter 5.

On the surface, these two theoretical frameworks may seem antithetical or
incompatible with the corporate sector of diversity training. Yet, after consideration, one
can see how applicable both theories are to this professional sector. Ladson-Billings is
more direct and intentional in her application, but her components align with the
motivational factors proposed by Deci and Ryan. In this regard, this research study
aligned each of the three components for both frameworks into matching pairs. First,
CRP’s student learning component aligns with competency element of SDT. Next cultural
competency, also referred to as the acknowledgement of cultural differences, aligns with
a sense of autonomy. Finally, sociopolitical consciousness or critical awareness of under-
representation aligns with a sense of relatedness. Competency refers to the basic desire to
feel a sense of effectiveness and mastery of their environment and social context. Next,
autonomy can be defined as the ability of individuals to make choices based on their own
free will. Finally, Relatedness refers to the social connections and a desire for
belongingness within or between a group or a group setting.

Although the individuals involved in this research share different socio-cultural
backgrounds than Ladson-Billings, and Deci and Ryan's primary audiences, they are all
motivated by the same contributing factors. Furthermore, it is important to note that these
educational theories work in the corporate realm as well.

**Research Participants**

A population of eight individuals was interviewed throughout the course of this
action research study. During the recruitment phase, ten individuals agreed to participate
in the study, but during the data collection phase, two participants had to drop out due to personal conflicts. All participants comprised of diverse backgrounds, ages, and professional experience. Six of the participants identified as female (75%), and two identified as male (25%). Five participants stated their racial identity as White or Caucasian, which equated to 62.5% of the sample population. Two participants, or 25%, identified as Hispanic or Latina, both were born outside of the United States and immigrated as children. One individual identified as a Black or African American racial demographic.

Additionally, one participant identified his sexual orientation as homosexual. All individuals (100%) self-identified as cisgender. Religious and economic diversity was not considered during the initial recruitment phase, but some individuals disclosed this information during the interview. Upon examination of the participant's demographics, this section will provide a brief description and background for each of the eight participants. All participants named in this study were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. The following section provides a brief description for each participant along with their associated pseudonym.

**Participant Description**

*Participant 1- Jackie,* an Account District Manager for a large Human Resource corporation, lives in a large eastern United States city. She identified her socio-cultural identity as a “35-year-old Caucasian lower-middle class woman.” She grew up in a small rural community before moving to her current residence after college.

*Participant 2- Scarlett,* an Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions-DEI Recruitment Specialist, identifies as a “woman of color who grew up in a marginalized
area where the entire diversity has been my biological family for the past hundred years.” She clarified her definition of “marginalized area” as an area where her family was the only family of color in a White community for several generations.

**Participant 3-** Becky, a Brazilian-born woman who immigrated to the United States in high school and currently lives in a large central city on the eastern coast of the United States, identifies as a straight Latina Brazilian-American woman. For her occupation she is a social media manager for an entertainment corporation.

**Participant 4-** Mia, a Mexican-born woman who immigrated to the United States in elementary school and currently lives in a major city located on the eastern coast of the United States, identifies as a Latina woman. She works as an international sales manager for a publishing company.

**Participant 5-** Cody, a graduate student studying psychotherapy, who was also the youngest of the participants, identifies as a white cis-gendered straight Asian-American upper-middle-class, physically abled student. He is the son of an Asian father and a White mother. He admitted that his detailed self-identification was influenced by “his lengthy academic career.”

**Participant 6-** Tracie, a middle school social studies teacher, currently resides on the western coast of the United States, though she has lived throughout the United States and parts of the United Kingdom. She identifies as a “heterosexual white female that has grown up with very liberal parents.”

**Participant 7-** Sophia is a White woman who is an adult business writing instructor. Her students primarily comprise English as a second language (ESL) learners and healthcare professionals. Prior to her current position, she had decades of experience
working in the fashion industry. She lives in the same large east coast city where she was born.

Participant 8- Benjamin is a young professional with five years of experience in advertising and marketing. He described his socio-cultural identity as a member of the LGBTQ+ community from an upper-middle-class, suburban, educated family. He described his career as a producer or someone who “is doing the actual work as opposed to overseeing and managing.”

While conducting the data analysis phase, two divergent groups appeared surrounding participant demographics: those that work in strictly corporate environments, and those work in academic or school environments. This divergence yielded interesting results specifically regarding their witness of or participation in discriminatory or negative examples of DEI training curriculums. While both groups work in similar environment, the scope in which they view training material and corporate DEI policies differ. The members of the two divergent groups are described below.

**Academic Group:** Scarlett, Tracie, Cody, and Sophia

**Corporate Group:** Jackie, Becky, Mia, and Benjamin

Understanding participant backgrounds, perspectives, and experience is key when examining, analyzing, and reflecting on the data collected throughout this research study.

**Findings of the Study**

The findings of the study demonstrate the existence of a lack of motivation to participate in employer-sponsored diversity training programs. Additionally, the study illustrated the existence of a disconnect between the employers’ impersonal management objectives and the real-life, very personal identities of their employees. Although, a
significant divergent point occurred between the academic and the corporate subgroups. The academic group regularly expressed the need, desire, and efficacy of improving how, when, and why diversity training is delivered. In this regard, this group perceptions centered on the negativity of the current practice of their employer mandated training. Conversely, the corporate subgroup overwhelmingly expressed the belief in the lack of benefits and efficacy of completing employer-sponsored diversity training. This group’s perceptions focused on the professionalism and required nature of the training, rather than the learning objectives. The balance of mandatory attendance versus attendance as a method of learning and implementing change illustrated the perception and motivation behind the participant groups responses to employer-sponsored diversity training.

In order to fully explore this divergence, as well as the overall motivation, perceptions, reactions, and resistance to mandatory diversity training, this qualitative case study coded the data through the lens of the three key themes related to the core elements of self-determination theory (SDT). The three themes are competency, autonomy, and relatedness. Each theme and topic will be further explored in more detail in the following subsections within this chapter.

**Competency**

Autonomy can be defined as the basic desire to feel a sense of effectiveness and mastery of their environment and social context (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the context of this action research study, this theme is used to explore the participants perception and reactions in two distinct manners. First, as a way to record and evaluate participants a sense of effectiveness and mastery of their environment and social context as it relates to employer-sponsored DEI training activities. Second, as a way to measure and evaluate
participants perception and reactions of cultural competency. Deci and Ryan (2017) and Ladson-Billings (2021) define cultural competence as the interaction, knowledge, adaptation, celebration, and appreciation of multiple cultures. Throughout the interview process participants were encouraged to talk about their interaction with stereotypes, how they challenge or confront stereotypes within the workplace, and their reaction towards institutional objectives combatting stereotypes. Additionally, the interviews generated exciting areas to explore surrounding how corporate individuals interact with employees of differing socio-cultural identities. This data coded within this section correlates with the sense of mastery, effectiveness, and benefits of their employer’s training, as well as their readiness to navigate socio-cultural differences within the workplace.

In order to explore this theme, I asked the following questions:

1. What do the terms Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion mean to you?

2. Describe to me a situation where you had stereotypes directed towards you or a coworker within the workplace.
   a. Probing Question: How do you challenge stereotypes and promote an inclusive environment?

3. What concepts or skills do you think are required to discuss Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the workplace?
   a. Probing Question: Describe to me a situation where you utilized multicultural and inclusive skills as learned in the DEI program/module to solve a problem.

4. Describe to me a time, if at all, when you have taken a training course, and you felt there was insensitive, inappropriate, or biased material inside the program?
Each of these questions will be further explored in the follow subsections.

**Competency Question 1- What do the terms Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion mean to you?**

This inquiry aimed to establish a baseline understanding of each participant's perspectives and reactions toward these three terms. After their answers, I followed up with a probing question where I instructed them to rank the most important of the three and then tell me why. 50% of the participants listed inclusion as the most important. One of the participants described inclusion as the “behavior, it's putting these values into action. So, taking steps to make them a reality.” The remaining 50% was evenly split between diversity and equity. In response to this question, Benjamin stated, “I would say my initial thought was equity because I just feel that that's really important.” Although after answering subsequent questions, he wanted to return to his order. He later clarified, “But I feel like you need to have the right people in the room and the right, yeah, I feel like you need the right people in the room first.” Sophia ranked equity as the most important but also said it was the most difficult to achieve; instead, we should focus on inclusion. She stated, “I think the other two get generated by inclusion, you know, and I think equity is the toughest and most aspirational of those three terms.” The goal of this exploratory question was to gather a baseline data set for participants initial perception and reactions towards DEI principles. Furthermore, this question served as an introductory probing opportunity where I could measure and evaluate the cultural competency of the participate group. Considering the population consisted of two divergent groups: those that work in an academic setting, and those that do not, this exploratory element provided crucial information.
Considering the importance of all three principles of DEI, it may seem arbitrary to list and rank them. This data showed each participant's internal and external dialogue in the context of their cultural competency and resulted in further probing opportunities. While discussing inclusion, Tracie shared a story where she had to learn how to navigate discussing culture within the classroom. Emerging from college, she accepted a position at an inner-city school district in Baltimore County, where she was the only White teacher on her team. She stated, “(they) threw a lot of things down the pipe that I was not ready for, and I learned my lesson the hard way. I made a big wave, made a big splash, and kind of got my hand slapped going, don't do that again.” I inquired further to see what Tracie meant when she said that she made a big wave and big splash. She explained that since she was a was one of the few white female teachers in her school, she learned to understand and control her perceptions of privilege and race. She learned to keep a neutral position regarding anything political, especially if that topic was in the recent news. She explained how cultural norms of her students and their families differ from the ones that she grew up with, and how it was okay to discuss these differences in a safe and welcoming environment. After a couple of times getting into trouble, she realized, “Okay, I just got to keep it underneath the radar.” The theme of “make small ripples, not big waves” continues throughout her teaching career.

**Competency Question 2- Describe to me a situation where you had stereotypes directed towards you or a coworker within the workplace.**

In order to continue with the theme of competency as it relates to their socio-cultural identity, in addition to the primary question, I asked the participants the following probing question, “how do you challenge stereotypes and promote an inclusive
environment?” Sophia recalled her career in fashion and the institutional bias and stigma toward heterosexual males in that industry. She referenced multiple occasions where she felt employees were overlooked or discriminated against due to their sexuality. This prejudice created an interesting shift from the societal norm but reinforced an industry norm. Sophia shared two stories about ageism and age discrimination in the workplace. Her first story occurred earlier in her career when she worked as a hiring manager for a smaller company, but her boss would have the final say over the final decision. Even though the position was for entry-level employees, her boss would pass on younger candidates in favor of older, mid-career individuals. She stated she “had respect for her boss in many ways, but his bias towards entry-level workers was not one of them.” This story presents an antithetical example of Ryan and Deci’s (2017) description of manager-subordinate autonomy supported relationship. Ryan and Deci (2017) states “When employees’ immediate supervisors were more autonomy-supportive, the employees were not only more satisfied with these direct supervisors but also were more trusting of the top managers of the corporation” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 537). This distrust and lack of supportive environment lowered Sophia’s engagement, productivity, and desire to continue her professional relationship with her manager.

Sophia's second story came at her expense. She related that it was towards the end of her fashion career after being laid off from her long-time position, and she sought an equivalent, yet she kept getting passed over for other candidates much younger than her. She described her story: “Up until that time, I never had a problem getting a job at all. I was always a pretty great interview and a good showman for most jobs I wanted.” She described this as the critical turning point where she left her career in the fashion
industry and looked for other opportunities, which is why she transitioned into a business writing instructor.

Cody expanded the discrimination or prejudice based on stereotypes also to include physical and neurological disabilities. He described this personal account during an earlier time in his professional career and the skepticism around physical and neurological disabilities in the workplace, “there's been a level of suspicion and condescension that is really making folks go above and beyond to prove the level of burdensome.” He likened this to the rejection of remote work for disabled employees. He continued by describing his belief that remote work can create a physically equitable environment for all employees.

Jackie continued this expansion of cultural competency by emphasizing the importance of promoting economic inclusion and understanding employees’ and customers’ socio-economic status. Considering her background in sales, her emphasis on economic inclusion was not a surprise, yet it created an unforeseen and unanticipated data point to consider throughout this action research study. She stated that between her upbringing in her hometown and her background in sales, economic empathy was a foundational trait she tried to utilize throughout her personal and professional career. While this trait was something she tried to focus on, she also admitted that it can sometimes be easier said than done, and she can become a victim of stereotyping. She described a story where she was a sales manager for a major retail telecommunication company, and when she would assist new customers, she would go through a corporate policy of pulling a soft credit check and background verification on the interested party. After the background check, the system would notify her if the customer required a
security deposit before finalizing the transaction. She explained that this system notification would alert her if someone has a low credit score or previously defaulted on payments. She admitted that it was easy for her to become disengaged within the conversation or steer the customer in a different direction because of the economic assumptions she made. This self-admittance reinforces the power of implicit bias and how it can unknowingly permeate a conversation or situation, even amongst those that may be aware.

Benjamin remarked how the field of marketing and advertisement creates a unique opportunity to display and understand multicultural and inclusive skills. He describes this challenge by questioning, “How can we ethically, you know, target certain groups if they are our target audience?” In addition to targeting, one must understand how to communicate with a target audience.

**Competency Question 3- What concepts or skills do you think are required to discuss Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the workplace?**

This exploratory question aimed to gauge each participant's understanding, receptiveness, and awareness of culturally relevant teaching techniques, along with their willingness to perpetuate these techniques. Central to this issue is the theme of communication and transparency within the workplace. Ladson-Billings concept of academic learning provides an interesting intersection of classroom and societal education opportunities. In reference to the importance of academic learning Ladson-Billings (2021) states, “despite the current social inequalities and hostile classroom environments, students must develop their academic skills” (p. 47). She continues by stating “The way those skills are developed may vary, but all students need literacy,
numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy” (p. 47). The emphasis on this skills growth and academic learning translates into the corporate setting in a fascinating and thought-provoking manner. Considering all of the participants work in different professional fields, while grouping them into two divergent groups, which are non-academic and academic environments, the scope of skills and skill acquisition falls into two emergent themes that focuses on learning opportunities that provide meaning to the individual. First, the academic participant group recognizes that students and learners believe the primary purpose of equity is to disrupt the culturally dominant discourse, in this case, the cisgendered White heteronormative society. This is done through a collective empowerment of the next generation of activist and change agents. In contrast, the non-academic group focuses their attention on a CRP based curriculum as a method of convenience, toleration, or a path of least resistance that continues the perpetuation of a desired corporate objective rather than the disruption of social discourse.

Interestingly, the participant group in the non-academic environment expressed few examples or issues within training programs and other company-sponsored content. Mia stated, “No, I've actually been very fortunate in the positions that I've been in where the companies I've worked for are very careful with that now, so I've never come across it.” Becky referred to “funny examples from TikTok and YouTube videos” as instances of negative DEI training programs but personally did not witness any of them. The quotes by Mia and Becky reinforce the perpetuation of toleration or convenience of DEI supportive training curriculums. They both acknowledge that this may be an issue
somewhere, but none that has directly faced them. In this regard, both participants did not demonstrate political and social skill growth after attending diversity training programs.

Conversely, the participant group who worked in an academic field expressed their criticism of DEI-based professional development. Scarlett held the strongest criticism of her experience in navigating training material. Her primary complaint centered around the fact that in her professional experience, DEI training was only done once per year as a special training day or training course. She advocated for a continuous process throughout the year utilizing a hands-on, active learning style approach to workshops, seminars, team building, and discussing and educating individuals on diversity-related topics. Her complaint comprised two central issues. First, she expressed her belief that many DEI training programs were whitewashed and focused on end results rather than underlying issues. Secondly, she believes DEI training courses do not tackle “hard issues” or issues of bias. She emphasized that DEI programs need to have “discussions to make people aware of their biases in order to overcome them. A lot of people, whether they are unintentionally ignorant or not, those biases are never discussed with them.”

Tracie and Cody shared similar, yet not as strongly as Scarlett, negative sentiments towards DEI training, particularly in their interest and attentiveness level while participating in the course. Cody expressed that while he has never experienced a biased training program, he admitted that if he did, he “probably tuned it out and started daydreaming.” While Cody was vague in his remembrance, Tracie was more specific and direct with an example of a “boring” DEI course. In her story, she shared an example of
taking a training course during the summer in her Arizonan school that had a broken air conditioning unit. Tracie stated,

I was getting kind of bored, and so I ended up doodling on my paper, and I, like everyone else by the way, was not the only one doodling, but I was singled out and called out for not paying attention to her; she kind of you should be not doodling and actually taking notes. And so I showed her my paper, which had a beautiful animal drawn on it, and I explained underneath the animal were my notes. So, I wasn't giving her attitude, but I was like, you know what, I need a break anyways. I got up, and I left.

After the incident in the classroom and the course was over, the principal met with the instructor to go over the altercation. After meeting with the instructor, the principal discussed the incident with Tracie. She continued her story describing how both Tracie and the Principal felt as though the instructor was “playing the race card” and “had it out for me” simply due to her being a White person.

The Black minority-majority had a much bigger, personal, and collective stake in the personal development and therefore were very sensitive to any dismissive behaviors, particularly from a White, middle-class woman in the room. Tracie explained that in her Arizona school, she was the only white female in her department, and the total white population of the school, for both administrators and students, was in the vast minority. According to Ladson-Billings (2021), “the place to find out about classroom practices is the naturalistic setting of the classroom and from the lived experiences of teachers” (p. 53). In this regard, the instructor felt dismissed by the student and believed Tracie did not value experience and the perspective of the teacher. On the other hand, when
participating in DEI-based professional development seminars, Tracie should “not shy away from conducting their own research about their practice” and “the investment of good practice must not be overlooked” (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 53).

After sharing her story, she hypothesized that the instructor must have felt Tracie disregarded the importance of the subject matter and assumed that she could not relate to the material, therefore, was daydreaming.

Competency Question 4- Describe to me a time, if at all, when you have taken a training course, and you felt there was insensitive, inappropriate, or biased material inside the program?

While most participants expressed their positive experience with DEI courses, each conveyed the theme that issues of diversity and inequality are something each of their respective teams does not discuss within the workplace. The need and desire to remain “professional” within the workplace is centered around this theme. Almost every interviewee that were categorized in the corporate group emphasized that DEI conversations were not appropriate topics for conversation around coworkers or within the workplace in general. An example of a DEI based conversation would be Transgender bathrooms, or gender pay gaps. They treated this as more of a taboo conversation than I initially expected during the study's preplanning phase. Becky explained her reasoning by stating, “I think like I don't think it's anyone's responsibility to teach other people how to behave.” She then elaborated that if you want to intervene, it is more important to approach the situation as a learning opportunity rather than a combative style. In her elaboration, she stated, “But in my perspective, I've learned that maybe it's a better approach to approach people in a more, hey, maybe you don't know that, you know, like
this is a learning moment.” Once again, the focus group was coded into two divergent groups, those in the academic setting, and those in the corporate sector. The focus group organized in the academic setting reiterated the importance of discussing controversial, sensitive, and timely DEI-based conversations in the workplace. Whereas the corporate group emphasized the unprofessionalism of these types of conversations outside of a DEI training program.

Tracie cited her story described above of her being thrown out of the classroom for not paying attention as a remembrance that discussing race in the professional setting can be a complex and sensitive topic. While DEI conversations are typically viewed from the lens of race, Tracie emphasized the difficulty in discussing gender and gender issues in the classroom. She stated, “A male teacher can definitely not approach a female student and try to do and talk about things that a female teacher can go and talk with a female student about.” She continues, “We've seen different colleagues even get caught up in talking with other colleagues, and that colleague gets offended because of certain scenarios or conversations.”

While a large number of the participants stated that they did not feel it was an appropriate conversation to have in the workplace, I asked them to rank themselves against their peers in terms of comfortability holding these conversations, whether in the workplace or in their private lives. Each participant ranked themselves on the higher end of the comfortability scale against their peers. Mia, for example, stated, “I would feel more comfortable speaking up for myself or speaking up for somebody else and actually just talking about it. Whereas younger me probably would not have had the courage to do that. I would have just let it slide.” Benjamin echoed this sentiment but conceded that
while he would not be “the loudest voice in the room, I would speak up if I could use my privilege and background to help a colleague in need.”

Examining how individuals interact, adapt, celebrate, and appreciate differing cultures is critical to understanding the role of implicit bias within corporate DEI training programs. This learning structure reinforces how receptive and engaged individuals are when interacting with individuals of differing cultures. After individuals acknowledge, interact with, and celebrate cultures beyond their own, the next step would be to examine their decision making and ability to exercise free will to do so.

**Autonomy**

For this study, I define autonomy as the ability of individuals to make choices based on their own free will. This intrinsic motivation creates a positive reinforcement of completing an act or deed without the need to be pressured (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the context of this action research study, this theme is used to examine how receptive and engaged the participants were in a DEI-supportive curriculum. Throughout the study, participants were questioned about how receptive they felt their organization was towards DEI practices and navigating complex socio-cultural identities. Additionally, participants discussed their vulnerability in confronting leadership regarding DEI issues and resistance. The data coded within this section coincided with a positive or negative belief in the participant's ability to express their authentic selves without fear of discrimination. Additionally, this section analyzes the participants' opportunities within their respective organizations to suggest, recommend, and implement change regarding DEI practices. This data coded within this section correlates with the participants sense of free will in choosing how and why they would attend their employer’s diversity training program, as
well as their readiness or sense of resistance to navigate socio-cultural differences within the workplace.

As part of the interview process, I asked each participant, “What aspects of your socio-cultural identity do you feel, if at all, you give up while working in your organization?” Scarlett reaffirmed her experience navigating the complexity of being tasked as an ambassador for an entire demographic. This ambassadorship is particularly prevalent in her current position, where she is the only person of color in her department. In her interview, she states, “I give up the fact that I’m seen as just a woman of color, so my experience must be similar or akin to other people of color.” She continued describing how the people in her professional world assume she knows little about small rural America's inner workings and social interactions. However, this is the exact kind of area where she grew up and the factor that lead towards her identity formation. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), identity formation is “the relative acceptance and integration of some identities and the modification or rejection of others” (p. 383). After answering the above question, I posed a probing question of how she would rectify her sacrifice. Scarlett responded by saying,

It's hard to, I guess because that requires some work on the other parts of people that I interact with. And again, that goes back to them wanting to be educated in others' experiences and stepping out of the bubble that people live in. So, if I could change anything, it would be hopefulness that they would want to be understanding of others' experiences.

The idea of hopefulness and the desire to educate others was a reoccurring theme for the optimism presented by the majority of the participants. While the desire for further
education and a social connection was a common theme, some individuals felt it was more realistic and beneficial to keep quiet and not cause a problem in the workplace when interacting with individuals. Jackie, for example, stated, “I think in a perfect world as it would just be no politics. We don't talk about it at all. Because I just think like it changes your view of people. And I'm a very judgmental person already.” A common theme presented in Jackie's interview was the hopelessness, controversy, and negative impact of discussing DEI and race in the professional setting. She asserted a few times that it was impossible to change individuals' minds. Therefore, according to Jackie’s perception around the importance of DEI training modules, she believed employers need to emphasize and reiterate more often. Those who already know the importance will listen, and those who do not will react and be resistant and hostile. This belief in the hopelessness of humans learning from mistakes and treating each other with equality was shared by 38% of the interview participants.

The duality of hopefulness and rejection presented by Scarlett and Jackie represents the two spectrums of autonomy within a DEI-supportive curriculum. Scarlett demonstrated a positive correlation with intrinsic motivation, whereas Jackie discussed how DEI could negatively impact extrinsic motivation. While Jackie emphasized that DEI is an essential aspect of education and social environments, her rejection of it lies from an engagement and social protocol perspective. While Scarlett promoted a positive viewpoint, she did acknowledge the difficulty and potential harm it could have. In response to a question pertaining to her comfortability level in informing leadership of DEI issues she may face, or issues of lack of awareness around DEI material or content, she stated, “It becomes a double-edged sword. If I vocalize it, then I become, I can be
considered, an aggressive or angry black lady.” Scarlett continued by stating, “It becomes a double-edged sword of choosing when or when not to advocate. So, nine times out of ten, I choose to advocate for the people I service versus myself.” In this regard, the motivating factor for attendance in DEI training programs for Scarlett is the ability and desire to help others. In contrast, her self-motivation is reduced due to her fear of persecution or retaliation from others.

Continuing the trend of an increased motivation to hide or lessen one's visible socio-cultural identity, Becky responded to the question, “What aspects of your socio-cultural identity do you feel, if at all, you give up while working in your organization” by describing the socio-cultural differences between corporate America versus Brazil. Becky describes Brazilians as more “lively, upbeat, and informal” versus her American counterparts. This stylistic difference created a sense of unprofessionalism within herself, where she feels she must put on a different persona to fit in. She described being “called out for her unprofessionalism” as a point in her career she would never forget. This social interaction became a fear. She became paranoid that others would know she was a naturalized citizen whose native language was not English. In this regard, Becky feels a negative motivation to share Brazilian culture unless it is brought upon by someone else. The feelings Becky shared is reminiscent of Du Bois’ (1903) concept of double consciousness. Du Bois (1903) defined double consciousness as a “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (pp. 9-10). In this particular case, Becky shared her struggle to maintain her Brazilian culture while also being forced to conform to dominant White culture.
The theme of negative motivation pertaining to one's self-identity continues throughout Cody's interview. When responding to the question pertaining to sacrifices and changes to their visible socio-cultural identity, Cody described working in a female-dominated industry and having to either hide his masculinity or accentuate it depending on the situation. Cody described this feeling when he shared, “I'm not the most masculine person, but I feel like I'm very conscious of it because I don't want to make other folks feel uncomfortable ever feel threatened or talked down to.” He continued by describing the power of his privilege, “I'm very conscious of one of the powers that I hold in society because of it, but I also try to kind of subdue the feeling like I'm a problem, so I'm avoiding some parts of myself.” Cody's description of masking his masculinity coincided with his negative motivation pertaining to gender identity, specifically the role of masculinity in the workplace. While this self-motivation was an opposing viewpoint, he did share optimism and a positive association towards educating and promoting others.

Cody’s description of hiding his identity, verbal patterns, and interests in the presence of those that may share a differing viewpoint refers to the linguistic practice of code-switching. Code-switching refers to the “switching from the linguistic system of one language or dialect to that of another” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Benjamin shared a similar sentiment to Cody in using code-switching based on social situations. He emphasized that his use of code-switching can be a conscious or unconscious act. In his interview, he stated,

If I'm working with a coworker, you never know their views, religious or not, you never know how they might perceive you, so sometimes I catch myself, you know, kind of changing how I present myself to be more quote-unquote neutral,
you would say to avoid any conflict, any, you know, stereotypes of discrimination. It definitely takes up your brain power; it definitely takes up your ability to problem solve and to brainstorm if you're consciously or unconsciously thinking about, you know, how do I look, how do I sound? How does this person perceive me? You know, so I think it affects the quality of work first and foremost.

The neutrality described by Benjamin is enhanced through recent controversies in the news pertaining to businesses either promoting or rejecting LGBTQ+ support. For example, Anheuser Busch Companies, LLC received strong backlash for promoting a partnership with a transgender social media influencer. This marketing decision resulted in both a boycott and call for increased purchasing depending on how the consumer’s opinion on LGBTQ+ aligned. Ultimately, this controversy resulted in two marketing executives for the corporation to be placed on leave while the company shifted marketing focus to other sectors (Creswell, 2023).

In addition to the Anheuser Busch controversy, the Target Corporation also faced similar backlash for supporting LGBTQ+ individuals through their Pride collection. In response to the negative focus, Target moved their Pride collection to the back of the store, resulting in additional backlash from consumers in support of LGBTQ+ people (Holman & Creswell, 2023). Targets responded to the controversy for the protection of their employees. According to Holman and Creswell, Target stated “about threats impacting our team members’ sense of safety and well-being while at work” (para. 4). Target and Anheuser Busch represent tangible, relatable, and contemporary examples of challenges, dangers, and perceptions Benjamin faces while in the workplace, thereby reinforcing his desire to remain “neutral” as a conflict avoidance strategy.
While this code-switching happens consciously and unconsciously, Benjamin emphasized that he has never felt discriminated against based on his sexual identity. He credits this to his social environment, mainly because he lives in historically very socially liberal communities and states. Although he does hide his social identities at times, he reaffirmed how DEI-supportive education and inclusion positively impact his motivation and believe there was a strong correlation with the motivation of his peers as well.

The theme of positive motivation continued throughout Tracie's interview, particularly around the role of educating others. Considering Tracie is the only formal educator amongst the participant group, she provided exciting data points for the role of motivation for herself and her students. When confronting political or controversial issues, she always assumes a neutral standpoint or plays "devil's advocate" in order to bring the discussion into a learning opportunity for all sides. In her experience, she describes the skills necessary to convert potentially hostile or resistant environments into learning opportunities through communication. She states, “Communication skills, I guess, would be the big one. Acknowledging differences and diversity, acknowledging that there are skills. And just experience on how to work with different diverse groups.”

As a teacher primarily working in Title 1 schools, she emphasized that at the end of the day, she finds the teaching, coaching, and mentorship role she plays in her students' lives most motivating.

Examining how willing and receptive individuals are to differing cultures is vital to understanding the role of the role personal autonomy plays in participants perceptions and reactions towards employer-sponsored DEI training programs. This learning structure reinforces individuals' willingness and engagement when interacting with groups of
differing cultures. After analyzing how willing a group is to interact with a differing socio-cultural group, the next step would be to explore their social connections and sense of belongingness.

**Relatedness**

Relatedness refers to the social connections and a desire for belongingness within or between a group or a group setting (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the context of this action research study, this theme is used to understand how individuals see themselves within their organization's structure and their engagement with the learning material. In order to explore this theme, participants' experiences were explored through the lens of gaining and subtracting elements of cultural identity within the workplace. This section examines the sense of belongingness of employees within their social environment regarding their socio-cultural identity and how it factors into their response, motivation to attend, resistance level, and desire for participation in diversity training programs.

The following key interview questions that facilitated these conversations were:

1) Describe to me one of your earliest memories where you first realized your socio-cultural identity?

2) What have you learned about your socio-cultural identity while working in your organization?

I followed up these questions with a probing opportunity to discuss areas where each participant felt they could rectify their sacrifice and questioned whether or not they felt comfortable informing their organization's leadership of the challenges they or their coworkers face in expressing their socio-cultural identity. The data coded within this section correlated with a positive or negative association with the feelings of inclusion,
acceptance, respect, personal and organizational communication, collaboration, empathy, and relationship building. Each of these questions will be explored in the subsequent subsections.

**Relatedness Question 1 - Describe to me one of your earliest memories where you first realized your socio-cultural identity?**

A common theme amongst all participants was this sociopolitical consciousness developing early in their formative years. Two participants (25%) described a memory from early childhood, with each being less than eight years old. Two individuals (25%) shared a memory during secondary school. Finally, the remaining four participants (50%) described a memory occurring during college.

Tracie and Sophia were the two participants that shared a memory that occurred during their early childhood years. Tracie describes herself growing up more as a “tomboy” rather than being the standard feminine daughter. The socialization and understanding of gender norms were a topic that Tracie shared in vivid detail. In the interview, she describes being around five or six years old, going to church, and having to dress in clothes that were outside her norm. Specifically, she would have to wear a dress, even though she hated wearing them and would often refuse. Upon challenging her grandmother on the gender norms and questioning why she had to wear a dress rather than her “normal clothes.” Her grandmother stated, “You will wear a dress because you are a little girl; you are going to wear a dress.” After that interaction, she conceded the social norm that little girls had to wear dresses, so she did, but only when it was appropriate. Tracie further elaborated, “I'm a girl, I gotta do what girls do, but I still wore
my bib overalls and played in the dirt.” She continued, “I was always going to be a girl, but I never wore makeup, though. That is still my rebellion. I still do not wear makeup.”

Sophia shared a similar memory to the one Tracie provided. Although Tracie's was centered on her confusion about gender norms, Sophia's emphasized how she was different from her parent's friends and neighbors. Sophia grew up in a Hasidic Jewish neighborhood; while she and her parents were not Jewish, they were Italian-Americans. Sophia described being around the age of four when her parents had a Black friend stay with them for a few weeks; this was one of her earliest memories of interacting with someone of a different skin color. While previously observing cultural differences, this was the first time she saw racial differences; she remembered a conversation with her father, “I was clear I'm not a black person, I'm not a Jewish person, I'm a white person.”

Mia and Becky were the two participants that described their sociopolitical consciousness occurring in middle school or high school. These memories coincided with them moving to the United States from Mexico and Brazil and interacting with the new social demographic. For Mia, this new environment created a culture shock where she could now very quickly see how different her culture was versus how others grew up throughout the world. Not only was this culture different, but it was also visibly different. In her story, she detailed feelings of judgment and bias just based on her looks.

Becky's experience navigating socio-cultural differences mirrored Mia's based on a culture shock and the realization that they may not have understood this new culture as well as they thought. Prior to moving to the United States, Becky spoke English as a second language, with Portuguese as her primary language. Upon starting high school, she initially thought that her familiarity with the English language would not be a cultural
barrier, but her experience in the classroom was contrary to her initial beliefs. During the interview, she described accounts of not understanding slang terms or other uncommon phrases within the English language. She remembered a vivid story surrounding an interaction with one of her classmates during one of her first days of the new school year. Her classmate asked her, “How many beds do you have?” Becky was confused and could not understand the question; the classmate also assumed that his question was misunderstood because of the language barrier; in her reflection, she said, “I'm like, how is that normal? And I was just so confused; I couldn't understand him. Like, I was like, beds? What do you mean?” Looking back at this interaction, Becky hypothesizes that the little boy assumed she fell under the stereotype of a poor South American girl with a large multigenerational family living under the same roof. At the moment, she was mad, but now a few decades removed from the situation, she found humor and lividity in the absurdness.

The shared experiences of Mia and Becky reinforce Ladson-Billings (2021) principle of sociopolitical consciousness and their ability to “critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 50). While Mia and Becky’s sociopolitical awareness occurred in high school, the rest of the participants credited their awareness to their experiences in college.

The remaining four participants, Jackie, Scarlett, Cody, and Benjamin described their earliest memories of social diversity in college. Each of these individuals grew up in smaller towns with little diversity, but all attended large universities that challenged their preconceived beliefs surrounding diversity. Jackie described growing up in a poor rural community but not fully understanding the complexity of socio-economic factors and
how race and gender directly impact socio-economic status. To this day, Jackie still challenges and rejects her hometown's beliefs. For example, she described stories and feelings of the vocal social commentary in her community surrounding George Floyd's death and Covid-19. Jackie states, “I know that the people that live where I grew up believe something that I don’t. And, you know, kind of seeing what their thoughts were like on social media, you know, I kind of blocked them.” This blocking represented both a physical and virtual distance, “I eventually got rid of social media other than Instagram because I just, I love them, but I can't see what they have to say.” She continues, “So I think that it was me seeing the racism that I grew up around, and the way that I reacted was just disengaging with them.”

Scarlett, similar to Jackie, also came from a small rural town with little diversity, yet her experience as a young Black woman was different. Scarlett and her family were the only people of color in her community, so she knew her cultural identity differed from her neighbors. She credits her understanding of socio-cultural identity to studying colorism and the brown paper bag test. Colorism was first coined by Alice Walker in 1982 to refer to forms of light-skin privilege within Black communities. According to this theory, lighter-skinned individuals face less prejudice and discrimination than darker-skinned individuals of the same racial group (Gabriel, 2007). The brown paper bag test is a term used to explain the discriminatory practice of colorism, in that privilege would be given towards individuals of skin color similar to or lighter than a brown paper bag. Before being exposed to this theory, Scarlett felt race was a binary system, yet she was multiracial. After exploring colorism, she focused more on an intersectional approach to DEI.
The theme of multiracial uncertainty and complexity continued throughout Cody’s interview. Cody described the self-consciousness feeling of being left out of a community because he was not “Asian enough, or white enough,” to belong solely to one group. Regarding his status as an Asian-American male, he stated,

It made me feel like if I didn't have a made me wonder what my place in a community that I, in many ways, belonged to was. And it brought me back to how I don't fully feel white in conversations surrounding the white experience. I don't fully feel Asian. So, it made me really question and feel out of place. It felt like there was disharmony there. Like, do I have to really watch my step? There wasn't a place where I could really kind of like share openly among folks.

This statement shared similar themes, messages, and frustrations to the one Mia, Becky, and Scarlett described. The complexity of race and ethnicity does not fit within a binary system of privilege and discrimination, thereby often leaving those in the middle feeling lost and self-conscious.

**Relatedness Question 2- What have you learned about your socio-cultural identity while working in your organization?**

The goal of this interview question was to explore how individuals perceive and react to their socio-cultural identity in the workplace as it intersects with institutional objectives. I followed up this initial question with a probing opportunity to discuss areas where each participant felt they could rectify their sacrifice and questioned whether or not they felt comfortable informing their organization's leadership of the challenges they or their coworkers face in expressing their socio-cultural identity. The data coded within this section correlated with a positive or negative association with the feelings of
inclusion, acceptance, respect, personal and organizational communication, collaboration, empathy, and relationship building.

Benjamin described one example of issues of relatedness within the workplace. In his interview, he described being a part of an almost entirely female team, with the only exception being him. He described his interactions with stereotypes directed towards him as mainly comprising assumptions about his interests based on his sexual identity. He stated, “Sometimes as a gay male, you do hear comments, you know, like oh, you must love this, or I know you love that.” He clarified that these comments were “not necessarily negative, but you know, depending on how it's presented or how it's said, it could be perceived like that.” Benjamin did acknowledge that he has faced very little direct discrimination or prejudice due to his sexual identity and that any comments he's faces can be mostly summed up as “watercooler conversations” that would be inappropriate for any person rather than specifically directed towards him. He expressed great relief and appreciation for his experiences, especially considering he has known people who have faced physical, emotional, and financial harm based on their sexual identity.

When discussing inclusion and acceptance within the workplace, Mia shared a story of a time earlier in her career at a previous organization where she was an administrative assistant to a sales director. She described this individual as an “old school salesman” that spoke very condescending towards her and other women within his department. She described his attitude and perception of females: “He thought of women as straight up like that they're just secretaries and that's all that they are.” Although Mia
faced gender discrimination, she does believe that her race did not factor in this discrimination.

While discussing topics of inclusion and acceptance within the professional setting, Cody described feeling trapped “in the middle ground” of his socio-cultural identity. Being biracial, half Asian, and half White, Cody struggles with self-confidence issues with his sense of community. He describes himself as White passing, and individuals often reject his Asian heritage based on his appearance. While describing his experience navigating his self-confidence in his biracial status, he states, “I don't fully feel white in conversations surrounding the white experience. I don't fully feel Asian. So, it made me really question and feel out of place. It felt there was like a disharmony there.” Considering Cody’s parents are not biracial, he confessed that he often struggled with talking about his feelings and opening up about his struggle with his biracial identity. He stated, “There wasn't a place where I could really kind of like share openly among folks, which felt important because I was thinking of this time period where we're feeling a lot of violence towards Asian people.” He continued, “And I was thinking of my own relatives and people I care about and feeling very worried about them and not having that space to kind of share at an equal level that it felt like a major loss there.” The experience and feelings Cody shared reinforced a lack of relatedness as a motivation for social change. The examples shared by Cody represent an externally regulated sense of motivation, in that he is “directly controlled by external and self-alien forces” (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

When discussing representative and inclusive training content within corporate DEI programs, Becky described positive learning provided by her company as a result of
insensitive training content. She remembered a diversity training course that used hyperbolic and stereotypical answers to describe what not to do in certain situations. She found the course humorous due to the absurdity of the answers. For example, she recalled a situation that asked, “Is it inappropriate to tell your Mexican friend you're going to a Mexican restaurant for Cinco de Mayo?” She found it humorous, but others in her organization found it insensitive and emphasized that this content was not meant to be humorous but informational, and anything beyond that distracted from the messaging. In response to the employee backlash, and growing social trends, her organization sponsored designated time biweekly for individuals to meet at a round table and discuss issues of DEI in a safe space. Attendance at these meetings was not mandated, and they were meant to be run by individuals within organizations. These roundtable discussions were designed to give individuals a platform to present their personal opinions and feelings towards discrimination or situations created by their socio-cultural identity. Becky credited this roundtable discussion to be the most informative and impactful DEI training she has ever attended.

Based on the coding of the study, the final data point to show the importance of understanding relatedness would be best summed up by Benjamin. Regarding exposure to large demographics in college, he stated, “You just realize that you're world is so much bigger, and to not assume that everyone had the same upbringing as you, so it was, you know, it was eye-opening. I think it was humbling in some ways.”

Examining the social connections and sense of belongingness is key to understanding the how employees perceive and react to employer-sponsored diversity training activities. This learning structure reinforces the social connections between and
within a group setting. These connections reinforce a sense of belongingness and a desire to work together to solve a common problem.

Chapter Summary

This action research study aimed to understand the underlying cause of motivation for employees to participate in diversity-related professional development sessions. The purpose of this action research study was derived from an examination of how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives.

Throughout the interviews, each participant shared positive and negative stories about their or a coworker's experience navigating socio-cultural issues within the workplace as it related to their employer’s DEI training program. Issues of professionalism and separation of DEI within work conversations were a common theme throughout the majority of the participants' narratives. While participants felt confident in their ability to hold sensitive and complex conversations surrounding DEI, they felt their peers shared a lower confidence level. Some individuals felt they could have a more significant impact as silent supporters; Sophia specifically stated that one of her biggest regrets in her career was that she wished she would have said something in the “moments where I was silently appalled and upset.” Chapter 5 presents the implications of the findings of the action research study and the recommendations for future considerations.
Chapter 5

Implications and Recommendations

The problem of practice for this study is the lack of motivation for employees to participate in diversity-related professional development sessions. The purpose of this action research study was derived from an examination of how a diverse group of people, individually and collectively, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives. Considering the diverse socio-cultural identities of the workforce, when analyzing an organization's susceptibleness to institutional bias, one must understand all social identities of an individual and how their social identities influence their environment.

Due to my role as a curriculum developer for a large global organization, as well as my experience delivering training content for working professionals, I witnessed firsthand the disinterest and lack of motivation of employees to participate in mandated and non-mandated employer-sponsored diversity training. While there are numerous personal and professional benefits to participating in diversity training, many employees are not motivated to participate in non-mandatory, which is how this research topic was generated.

I conducted this qualitative study to better understand and analyze the motivations, perceptions, and reactions of academic and corporate employees participating in employer-sponsored diversity training programs. An interview was
conducted as the primary data collection method in order to gather and examine the lived experiences of employees who participated in a corporate-sponsored diversity training program. The interviews conducted during this action research study consisted entirely of one-on-one discussions.

This action research study included eight participants with diverse backgrounds, careers, socio-cultural identities, ages, and professional experience. Through the use of a thematic narrative inquiry, and ethnographic, case study, this qualitative research study explored the complexities, challenges, and solutions for navigating complex socio-cultural identities in the workplace.

Through interviewing working professionals, this study examined the following research question:

1. Within corporate and education settings, how does a sampling of employees from various backgrounds perceive and react to the objectives, benefits, and efficacy of employer-sponsored diversity training programs?

After data collection, the data analysis procedure began with code development. The primary method involved a thematic analysis. After all of the data was coded, three emergent themes were identified. These themes provided greater insight into understanding the problem of practice identified in this research study. The findings revealed that the employees are motivated by a greater sense of autonomy, competency, and relatedness within the training material.

Furthermore, the reaction and perception of diversity training programs were split into two groups: those involved in education and those who were not. A recurring theme amongst the academic group was the need to improve, promote, and discuss DEI-related
content continuously. Conversely, a reoccurring theme amongst the non-education developers (corporate sector) was the unprofessionalism or inappropriateness of discussing DEI-related topics inside the workplace. As demonstrated through the data illustrated in Chapter Four, the effectiveness of a training program is predicated not only on the behaviors of the research participants as employees but also on the behaviors of the training instructors and the culture of the workplace environment.

This chapter discusses the relationships between my findings and current literature, implications for further research, my next steps and reflections, research limitations, and implications for future research, and provides a summary of this action research study.

**Results Related to Existing Literature**

Chapter Two provided information and background on related research and key topics such as privilege, resistance, diversity training, profitability, and productivity. In addition to background information on related research, chapter two also introduced the framework in which the study was grounded. I supported this action research study with Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy (1995), Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, as well as related research, focused on privilege, resistance, gender, diversity training outcomes, and employee productivity all through the epistemological lens of social reconstructionism.

When conducting a research study rooted in employee motivation, it is crucial to understand the negative factors that challenge DEI, such as oppression, privilege, and resistance. Oppression allows for perpetuating domination through cultural, institutional, and individual means (Goodman, 2001). The perpetuation of domination reinforces the
cultural, individual, and institutional control to create a systemic privileged group that
reinforces and strengthens the behavior norm of society. While privilege may not
necessarily be inherently bad, the negative line only occurs once individuals are aware of
their privilege and actively disregard social justice (Lazzarre, 1996). All three topics are
related closely to one another, especially when malicious intent is involved.

This action research study contributes to existing literature in two key areas. First,
by examining the navigation of diverse social identities within a corporate environment
through the framework of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and self-determination
theory (SDT), with a focus on training curriculum. Secondly, by evaluating and analyzing
employee perception of employer-sponsored DEI curriculum. These two areas are all
enveloped through the overarching lens of the figurative battleground between
institutional objectives and employee motivation.

Self-Determination Theory

Ryan and Deci (2017) discussed that human motivation is impacted by autonomy,
competency, and relatedness. Furthermore, these three components of motivation must all
be in effect in order for employees to be fully engaged. As this research indicated,
employees are motivated by the same three components described by Deci and Ryan.
However, as described in Chapter Four, unmotivated or employees not fully engaged in
the material do not feel a positive sense of the three components. Some participants
expressed a positive sense of all three, while others conveyed just one or two
components. The participants who did not feel an adequate sense of autonomy,
competency, and relatedness with the training material or institutional objectives
described their resistance towards their organization. The data presented in this action
research study shows that a mismatch exists between the institutional objectives and the training process. The motivations described by the participants are in various forms: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. Most notably, the participants who described a fear or caution of presenting their true authentic selves were motivated to do so through the extrinsic fear of persecution. Whereas the participants who only engaged with the material due to an institutional requirement demonstrate amotivation due to their expectation that the activity will not result in a desirable outcome.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

We do not live in an isolated society; like our classrooms, our work environments are dynamic and increasingly diverse. An inclusive workplace is predicated on the same dimensions that make for a dynamic and welcoming classroom. Whether it is a business or an academic institution, its success is determined by its residents' desire and ability to drive progress forward, in other words, to learn. Therefore, in order to move onward with the utmost participation of employees, there must be a greater awareness on everyone's part of the diverse cultures that are expected to be full participants within society. This awareness correlates with Ladson-Billing's culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) three principles of student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014). The research presented in this study describes the perceptions and reactions of employees who participate in employer-sponsored diversity training courses. Ladson-Billings CRP provides a path forward; her three components provide a way to move beyond and solve the problem of practice identified within this action research study. Employers need to think about learning and cultural differences and always keep an eye out for equity and social justice.
Student learning refers to the acquired knowledge and intellectual growth from the start to the end of the learning experience. This component is key to measuring and evaluating learning, thereby equating to the educational program's effectiveness. It is important to note that this learning does not have to be representative of a tangible evaluation. Instead, this growth can be emotionally driven, where the participants leave the classroom feeling more empathetic or motivated to continue their research or desire to understand the subject further. In relation to this action research study, the data illustrated a divergent understanding of the role DEI plays in the efficacy and benefits of institutional objectives. Therefore, it can be reasonably inferred that the disconnect of employee motivation lies within the decreased sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the material. In this regard, the participants feel motivated to complete the non-mandatory diversity activity due to their perception that the training will not yield a desirable outcome, which, by extension, means they do not feel they will have tangible growth following the course.

Cultural competence refers to the context in which students use their culture and experience to apply meaning and relevance to the acquired information. This component reinforces the importance of understanding multiple cultures and identities when constructing training material. As demonstrated throughout this action research study, employees do not feel their institution has their best learning in mind and instead rely on singular solutions related to DEI. Conversations of professionalism and inappropriateness were common themes amongst those who only acted as learners outside the scope of DEI programs. Therefore, it is highly recommended that businesses consider cultural
differences and how an intersectional approach to DEI can be beneficial and effective to both employees and institutional objectives.

In addition to student learning and cultural competence, the participants identified a high degree of sociopolitical consciousness or the ability to challenge cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions perpetuating social inequities. While all of the participants identified various forms of oppression and discrimination within their professional careers, most of them were reluctant to intervene, primarily due to the extrinsic motivation of fear, violence, or over-stepping their place within the workplace. This data shows the disconnect between wanting to remain neutral and rejecting “politics” in the workplace while striving for all employees' equity and safety. This data demonstrated that the act of teaching is political, as is the interaction within organizations. Failure to engage in sociopolitical consciousness represents an acceptance of the status quo, which, as examined previously, is the white cisgender heterosexual male culturally dominant discourse.

Now that the study for employee motivation as compared to institutional objectives is completed, the next step would be the analysis of the learning components, which includes everyone: all students, all employees, all business leaders, managers, and administrators. According to Ladson-Billings (1995; 2014), there must be a constant vigil for inequities and injustice. Employers need to think about learning and cultural differences and always keep an eye out for equity and social justice.

**Implications for Further Research**

Upon reflecting on the existing literature and the data collected throughout this action research, several research implications could be derived from this study. First,
upon initial categorization of the participants, two divergent groups appeared: those who
work in strictly corporate environments and those who work in academic or school
environments. This divergence yielded interesting results regarding their witness or
participation in discriminatory or negative examples of DEI training curriculums. The
participants who strictly work in the corporate environment described fewer instances of
witnessing negative or derogatory training material. They also consistently expressed the
belief that DEI conversations in the workplace were not professional and, therefore,
should not be conducted. On the other hand, the group of participants who worked in an
academic setting described multiple instances where they witnessed or participated in
examples of discriminatory DEI training programs and training material. This group
emphasized the importance of discussing DEI in the workplace.

This dichotomous experience was an unanticipated result; therefore, I could not
go more in-depth during the data collection and analysis phase and further research to see
if this correlation would continue over a larger sample population or additional
interviews. The fascinating aspect of this dichotomous relationship is that those who
work in the corporate sphere are entirely isolated from an educational, instructional, and
learning perspective. In contrast, those involved directly with academia regularly worked
with developing and delivering DEI-supportive material. One can wonder how this data
would skew if a participant landed in the middle between academic and corporate.

Considering my positionality, the next step in the continuation of this research project
would be to include an additional subset of participants who serve as instructional
designers, corporate trainers, and those involved in other human resource-led
departments. Repeating this study with three sample groups, all operating within different ecosystems, could result in alternative data.

Furthermore, the data reflected in action research study shows a psychological dissidence in employee motivation for participating in corporate diversity training. This dissidence is shown in the dichotomous viewpoints of the corporate and academic groups. Therefore, while beyond the scope of this action research study, an implication from this study would be the further examination of why this dissidence exists, and how instructional designers, educators, and corporate trainers can challenge this protest and encourage active participation.

**Further Research Opportunities**

The findings of this study reiterated the importance of balancing the autonomy, competency, and relatedness of a supportive curriculum within the corporate environment. Furthermore, the research findings uncovered a divergent group of those actively engaged in education and those passively on the outside as mere participants. According to Deci and Ryan, all three components are necessary for an engaged participant. However, this study did not measure if one aspect of motivation was more important than another. Therefore, conducting the study three additional times would be beneficial, where the main focus would be solely related to one of Deci and Ryan's three components of motivation. Additionally, considering the sample population and their respective professions, it would be beneficial to repeat this study to include those individuals who create diversity training programs. It would be fascinating to examine how instructional designers, corporate trainers, and corporate educational leaders reconcile the three dimensions of motivation outlined in this action research study.
Additionally, while this action research study was conducted through a qualitative action research case study paradigm, there may be other methods to study this practice problem. After examining the divide in motivation and perceptions of DEI and DEI-related content, the next step would be to conduct a longitudinal study in which the researcher could examine the effectiveness of one specific DEI training course or training material. This study, combined with Deci and Ryan's SDT along with the Ladson-Billings CRP framework, could provide an interesting quantitative or mixed-methods research study. While beyond the scope of this action research study, a quantitative examination could yield fascinating results.

Finally, while this study focused on the psychological motivations for employee participation in mandatory and non-mandatory employer-sponsored diversity training. A future study could compare the psychological motivations and apply instructional design principles for encouraging active participation. This future study could utilize Gagné and Wager’s (1988) instructional design principles as a means to examine the efficacy, objectives, processes, and strategies for developing and implementing a beneficial and engaging diversity training program.

Overall, these three future research opportunities provide just a small sample of how this psychological and motivational study could apply and contribute to the field of adult learning and instructional design.

**Limitations**

This action research study was designed to explore a problem of practice within the researcher's local context. Considering this goal, three limitations presented
themselves throughout the study. These limitations include the sample population, the length of the recruitment cycle, and the participant demographics.

**Sample Population**

The goal of this qualitative action research case study was to examine how a sample of employees throughout different sectors, demographics, and identities perceive and react to the objectives, benefits, and efficacy of employer-sponsored diversity training programs. While this research study was initially conducted with an intended population of 10, as described in chapter Four, the total participants provided an adequate snapshot into a sample population of the workforce. Therefore, while the population included a small sample size, the overall study still provided significance to the overall field of adult education within the corporate environment. This significance occurs through a three-fold perimeter. First, this study incorporated a multidisciplinary approach to adult education and included opportunities to infuse academic theories within a real-world application. Second, this study explored the growing disconnect between employer’s impersonal management objectives and the personal and individual identities of their employees. While the sample population was limited, this snapshot provided the evidence, motivation, and starting point to continue exploring this topic further and with a larger sample size. Third, this sample study demonstrated the existence of a lack of motivation within the corporate sector regarding mandatory DEI training. Yet, the efficacy and benefits of such a training was not able to be reasonably concluded, therefore this study provides a starting point to further explore the root causes and opportunities for improvement within the realm of corporate diversity training.
Qualitative action research tends to have a smaller participant population; therefore, the criteria for selecting these participants could be quite limiting (Mertler, 2017). As described in Chapter Three, the recruitment method for this study included a snowball sampling approach, where the researcher contacted an initial group of participants and then requested the volunteers to chain the recruitment letter to more individuals. Due to the snowball sampling approach, the social demographics for professions did skew beyond the desired sample population. In addition, two other individuals agreed to participate but withdrew their availability during the study. The number of participants and recruitment methodology limited the interview population, which could have yielded different findings.

**Length of Recruitment Cycle**

The second limitation within this qualitative action research study included the overall length of recruitment. Based on the established pre-planned time frame for recruitment, I overestimated the interest level for participants. This overestimation limited the duration for how long I could recruit potential volunteers, thereby limiting the diversity amongst the participants. Repeating this study with the inclusion of a longer recruitment cycle could provide a larger subsection of the corporate workforce, thereby providing more data for analysis.

**Participant Demographics**

This study's final limitation centers around the participant group's socio-cultural identities. While the study's population was diverse, the individuals who participated belonged to similar social demographics. For example, only one participant self-identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. At the same time, only one
individual self-identified their racial demographic as Black or African American. Finally, this study entirely comprised cis-gendered people and heavily leaned females. The limitation surrounding the socio-cultural identity of the participants proved to be a challenge; a more diverse and increased sample population could have provided further context and data to support the study.

Summary

This qualitative exploratory case study sought to explore the perceptions of how a diverse sampling of people, individually, negotiate identities in corporate and education fields where those in control must both accommodate and placate in order to maintain institutional objectives. Diversity training, along with legal compliance training and general upskilling training, is a frequent occurrence in the modern-day workplace, yet diversity training tends to focus on analyzing specific outcomes rather than understanding the underlying reasons for resistance and receptiveness (Israel et al., 2017). Therefore, the learners often struggle to relate to the material, ultimately leading to the perpetuation of resistance or rejection.

The research included in this study revealed corporate professional's motivation and demotivational factors. Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that while most participants agreed on the importance of including a DEI-supportive curriculum, the appropriateness level, professionalism, and mandatory nature of DEI training programs were in question. However, a gap still exists between acknowledging and applying what employees are learning and what employers desire.

Overall, this action research study is only the beginning of the continuing study of the social dynamics of the workforce and how employees navigate and accept socio-
cultural identities and diverse representation in the corporate training environment. Considering my position as a corporate instructional designer, understanding and analyzing the social dynamics of internal and external stakeholders is crucial to developing representational and inclusive corporate training programs. Overall, this action research study neither proved or disproved of a growing disconnect between employers and employees centering around the institutional objectives behind employer-directed DEI training programs. Therefore, this sampling study reasonably indicates the need to expand the research to include a larger sample population of curriculum developers as well as an overall larger subsect of employees inside and outside the realm of education. I plan to continue the exploration of the social dynamics of an intersectional training curriculum.
References


https://doi.org/10.1300/J367v01n03_03


https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9588-7_1


Appendix A

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW

Robert Kerin
Wardlaw College 201
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: Pro00126660

Dear Mr. Robert Kerin:

This is to certify that the research study Emphasizing a Culturally Relevant Training Program: An Examination of Institutional Bias was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2) and 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7), the study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on 3/24/2023. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the study remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research study could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this study was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

All research related records are to be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Lisa Johnson at lisa@emailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-4876.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
OCR Assistant Director and IRB Manager
Appendix B

Interview Invitation Letter

Hello,

My name is Robert Kerlin. I am a doctoral candidate in the Curriculum Studies Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Education, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study is sponsored by the University of South Carolina.

I am studying the motivations, perceptions, and reactions of employees who participate in an employee-sponsored diversity training program. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview about you experience navigating socio-cultural differences within the workplace.

In particular, you will be asked questions about your socio-cultural identity, multicultural inclusion skills, culturally responsive training techniques, and institutional bias. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The virtual meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and should last about 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Although we have described the general nature of the tasks that you will be asked to perform during this study, the full intent and purpose of the study cannot be explained because doing so would bias the study results.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at my personal space. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You are free not to take part, or to stop taking part at any time. If you withdraw from this study, the information you already have given to the study team will be kept private.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me via phone: 724-407-3511 or email: rkerlin@email.sc.edu or my faculty advisor, (Dr. Todd Lilly, 585-732-1838, and lillyt98@mailbox.sc.edu)
Concerns about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Johnson, Associate Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-6670 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the phone number or email listed below to discuss participating.

With kind regards,
Robert Kerlin
724-407-3511
rkerlin@email.sc.edu
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Participant Name. (Pseudonym): ___________________________________________

Email Address: ___________________________________________________________

Additional Contact Information: _____________________________________________

Date of Interview: _____________ Day: _____________

Beginning Time of Interview: ____________ Ending Time of Interview: __________

Interview Conducted: Zoom_____ Phone Call _____ Other _________________

1) Initial perceptions and background gathering

a. Question: What do the terms “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” mean to you?

   i. Probing question: Of the three (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion), which do you feel is the most important?

Researcher Notes:

b. Question: How would you define implicit or institutional bias?

   i. Probing question I: Can you tell me more about a time where you witnessed institutional bias first-hand, either in your professional or personal experience?

   ii. Probing question II: How did that make you feel?

Researcher Notes:
a. **Question**: Define your socio-cultural identity

   iii. **Probing question**: Describe how your personal experience shape your professional work?

   iv. **Probing question II**: Describe, if possible, how your team acknowledges your socio-cultural identity.

*Researcher Notes:*

   b. **Question**: Describe to me one of your earliest memories where you first realized your socio-cultural identity? (Gender, racial, sexual, ethnic identity, etc.)

   v. **Probing question**: How did that situation make you feel?

   vi. **Probing question**: What advice would you give your past self?

*Researcher Notes:*

2) **Experience navigating socio-cultural differences in the workplace.**

   a. **Question**: Describe to me a situation where you utilized multicultural and inclusive skills to solve a problem.

      i. **Probing question**: How did you address or navigate potential conflict?
ii. **Probing question II**: Tell me more about the resistance, if any, you faced.

*Researcher Notes:*

b. **Question**: Describe to me a situation where you had stereotypes directed towards you or a coworker within the workplace.

i. **Probing question**: How do you challenge stereotypes and promote an inclusive environment?

*Researcher Notes:*

c. **Question**: What culturally responsive techniques do you employ when constructing training material?

i. **Probing question**: Do you feel you have the agency and authority to employ these techniques?

ii. **Probing question II**: Do you feel the organization provides you with the necessary resources to develop these techniques?

*Researcher Notes:*

d. **Question**: What concepts or skills do you think are required to discuss Diversity Equity and Inclusion within the workplace?

i. **Probing question**: How prepared are you to navigate these conversations?

*Researcher Notes:*

e. **Question**: What have you learned about your socio-cultural identity while working in this organization?

i. **Probing question:**
Researcher Notes:

f. **Question:** Describe a time where you changed your personal style or technique in order to work more efficiently within someone of a different socio-cultural background?

   i. **Probing question:** What did you give up?

   ii. **Probing question II:** What would you have done differently?

Researcher Notes:

g. **Question:** What aspects of your socio-cultural identity do you feel you give up while working in your organization?

   i. **Probing question:** How would you rectify that sacrifice?

   ii. **Probing question II:** How would you inform leadership of the challenges you face, or others, expressing your socio-cultural identity within the workplace?

Researcher Notes: