



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

SUMMARY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND SCIENCE OF DIVERSITY TRAINING

Psychologists are deeply engaged in theory, research, training, and interventions to advance principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). While theory, research, and interventions continue to evolve and improve, a review of evidence strongly points to positive benefits of research-based diversity training programs. This document summarizes some of the key research findings.

Evidence-based diversity training programs seek to elevate the understanding of harmful social hierarchies in American society, which is critical to their eradication.

These programs do not attack or demean any individuals because of their race, gender, or other identities. Rather, they encourage introspection into our own attitudes, values, beliefs, and assumptions, some of which may be outside of our conscious awareness. In addition, they encourage us to examine our nation's systems, structure, and institutions, which have evolved in an historical context in which harmful social hierarchies – such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism – were accepted as “natural” and even necessary for social order. These hierarchies marginalize disadvantaged groups while benefiting others. In this manner, these hierarchies minimize the value of marginalized populations and their potential contributions to their communities. As a nation, we all suffer from the inability of disadvantaged populations to reach their full potential.

The adoption of diversity training followed affirmative action efforts in the 1960s and 1970s that changed the demographic composition of many organizations.

These early trainings were often responses to, or preventative measures against, discrimination lawsuits (Johnson & Packer, 1987). Organizational diversity initiatives, programs, and policies were intended to increase the fairness of organizations and promote the inclusion, hiring, retention, and promotion of underrepresented groups (Dover, Kaiser, & Major, 2020). Although laws prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, disability, and religion have been in effect for decades in many nations, employment discrimination persists (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016). Recent research in Europe, North America, Asia, South America, and Australia demonstrate that identically qualified job applicants experience differential callbacks and job offers as a function of their demographic characteristics (Baert, 2018). Whatever the rationale for adopting diversity initiatives, one could argue that they are an important and valuable social good because they create fairer workplaces and support the careers of traditionally underrepresented groups. Several investigations indicate that workplaces perceived as fair and diversity-supportive are beneficial for worker morale, productivity, and commitment (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009).

Addressing the systemic challenges stemming from social hierarchies is particularly important during the pandemic. We know that COVID-19's devastating disproportionate

impact on people of color is, in part, the result of pre-existing inequities that arose from our nation's history of policies and practices – both formal and informal – that have disadvantaged these communities. The coronavirus, however, does not discriminate based on race and ethnicity. As long as some populations are disproportionately affected, we are all at risk. It is therefore an urgent matter of national security, human health, and well-being that we confront our history, as well as contemporary policies and practices, to ensure that negative social hierarchies of any kind do not unfairly constrain opportunities for health and well-being for any group.

DEFINING DIVERSITY TRAINING

Evidence-based diversity training programs seek to encourage participants to consider diverse viewpoints, and to view individuals as complex beings who cannot be reduced to group stereotypes. Such trainings also encourage participants to understand that our nation's history with respect to race, gender, and other identities cannot be ignored.

Divisiveness and blaming participants are not considered part of evidence-based diversity trainings. Diversity training has been characterized as an educational process that fosters positive intergroup relationships (Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007). It can be defined as a distinct set of programs aimed at facilitating positive intergroup interactions; reducing prejudice and discrimination; and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of people to interact with diverse others (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012). Diversity training is promoted both as a resolution to problematic workplace relations and as a means to unleash the creative potential of diversity, such that organizational effectiveness is enhanced (Naff & Kellough, 2003).

Modern understanding of diversity training is grounded in research and science.

Diversity training is typically informed by evidence from psychological science, as well as the structure and needs of the organization (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016). Diversity training has also been informed by multicultural research first carried out by social psychologists (Pendry et al, 2007). Diversity training initiatives have been associated with positive results for over 40 years (Bezrukova et al., 2016), demonstrating success in enhancing the strengths of multiculturalism in business, education, health and mental health care, medicine, and science. Diversity training can take different forms, but most programs implicitly or explicitly aim to reduce people's biased attitudes and behaviors during everyday activities in organizations (Adam, Heissel, & Eccles, 2015). Bias can harm the mental and physical health of employees who experience it, interfere with their performance and engagement, and undermine their professional development and promotion (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Bias also undercuts efforts to increase inclusion and diversity in who gets hired and fills management positions. Conversely, employees view companies that explicitly commit to recognizing and celebrating diversity as more trustworthy. A major goal of anti-bias training is to increase awareness of the ways that bias manifests in society, organizations, and individuals (Carter, Onyeador, & Lewis Jr, 2020).

Research-based diversity training is an important tool that can help organizations and individuals better understand and address critical problems facing the nation. A 2005 United States Government Accountability Office study (GAO, 2005) described leading practices for diversity management. These practices, derived from a panel of experts, included: receiving commitment from top leadership, integrating diversity as part of the organization's strategic plan, linking diversity with performance (i.e., a more diverse workforce increases productivity and performance), using quantitative and qualitative measures of impact, holding leaders accountable for the progress of diversity initiatives, strategically planning for diverse leaders, recruiting diverse employees, involving employees in creating a diversity-friendly culture, and supporting diversity training.

Specific to diversity training, King, Gulick, and Avery (2010) propose best practices that include: a needs assessment to identify the needs of the organization/institution, the context in which the organization/institutions are situated (e.g., creating a culture that values diversity and diversity training, starting with upper management), clear competency-based behavioral goals (e.g., skills-attainment) to effect positive individual and collective change. Bendick et al. (2001) developed a list of benchmarks for diversity training: connecting diversity to organizational goals, tailoring training to client needs, receiving support from upper leadership, including employees from multiple levels, changing the corporate culture, having experienced trainers lead the program, discussing discrimination in a general fashion, addressing individual behavior, and mapping the training onto HR practices.

Sue (1991) also proposes a multidimensional model for diversity training focused on organizational intervention, barrier identification, and competency-based skills building. This 3x3x3 model allows trainers to target the areas needing training: the organization's functioning (recruiting, retaining, and promoting diverse employees), contextual barriers to diversity (cultural differences, individual or collective discriminatory attitudes/practices, systemic barriers), and/or competencies (beliefs/attitudes, knowledge, and skills). This matrix design allows trainers to tailor interventions to the needs of the audience. However, Sue also cautions against using this model too myopically without appreciating the larger picture. He recommends taking time to understand the larger context of multiculturalism and the systemic forces that work to contain or suppress this rather than focusing efforts on specific problem areas without making concomitant economic, structural, and behavioral changes. He also recommends taking a strongly antiracist stance when providing such trainings to address the deep-seated roots that perpetuate systems of oppression and marginalization.

Implicit bias education and training is of critical importance to deconstruct systems infused with bias that benefit some while punishing and suppressing others. The social consequences of holding multiple oppressed identities often manifests through unconscious or implicit biases (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Implicit bias refers to the overlearned attitudes and stereotypes so deeply embedded within us that they operate beyond our conscious awareness. These biases often manifest without malintent but have insidious and deleterious

effects on the recipient. Evidence points to the pervasiveness of implicit biases in multiple domains including healthcare (e.g., Chapman, Kaatz, & Carnes, 2013; FitzGerald & Hurst, 2017), the courtroom (Faigman, Kang, Bennett, Carbado, Casey, Dasgupta, Godsil, ... Mnookin, 2012), the police (Ross, 2015), and public policy (Nosek & Riskind, 2012). These biases serve as vehicles for maintaining and perpetuating discrimination, inequities, and oppression. Prohibiting federal workers from receiving such training not only thwarts efforts toward social progress and equity; it also serves to maintain their own biases and protect them from the perceived threat that greater equity will compromise their own power.

Education and training on implicit bias is clearly of critical importance to deconstruct systems infused with bias that benefit some while punishing and suppressing others. The OMB memos and EO's demand to prohibit such training not only thwarts efforts toward social progress and equity, but also perpetuates existing biases.

EFFICACY AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES

A large-scale meta-analysis that examined diversity initiatives from 260 different studies across a variety of organizational settings, including businesses and education, found significant evidence that diversity training effectively educates participants (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016). Furthermore, the same study found that longer diversity training experiences were associated with significant changes not only in education but also in more positive and tolerant attitudes toward others, including improved social skills to interact with diverse people (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

Diversity training is commonly used in businesses to enhance competitiveness in the global marketplace, with the rationale that diversity training enhances the ability to interact more effectively across cultural barriers (Ramsey & Lorenz, 2016). For employees, there is evidence that the diversity training initiatives may better prepare employees for working in multicultural contexts. A meta-analysis of 65 different studies of diversity training initiatives in organizations found that the trainings were associated with significantly improved multicultural thinking and multicultural skills of employees (Kalinowski, Steele-Johnson, Peyton, Leas, Steinke, & Bowling, 2013). Diversity training has the potential to make a positive impact on organizational outcomes when it addresses prejudice, stereotyping, and other biases (King, Dawson, Kravitz, & Gulick, 2010). Literature indicates that after diversity training: (1) individuals become more satisfied due to positive work climates; (2) diverse groups can be more effective and generate more new ideas for innovation; and (3) organizations can obtain a competitive advantage due to improved outcomes related to less turnover, better coordination of information, improved client relations, and fewer Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints. For students, diversity training initiatives may help better prepare them to competently negotiate the realities of the global economy. Diversity training interventions among business students have been associated with increased cultural education and global identity (Erez, Lisak, Harush, Glikson, Nouri, & Shokef, 2013; Ramsey & Lorenz, 2016), likely resulting in

increased competence in the global marketplace. In addition, diversity training has been helpful to expand the inclusion of women in the workforce. Online diversity training programs have been found to effectively change attitudes toward women in the workforce as well as encourage behavior change in those already receptive to women co-workers to enhance worker climate (Chang, Milkman, Gromet, Rebele, Massey, Duckworth, & Grant, 2019).

Diversity training initiatives have also played an important role in improving educational outcomes. Psychological research has found evidence that diversity training initiatives in schools may benefit the educational outcomes of all students. Diversity education initiatives benefit both white students and students of color in the areas of general education, diversity competence, intellectual development, personal development, science and technology, and vocational preparedness (Hu & Kuh, 2003). One diversity training initiative conducted at a major midwestern university was found to be associated with increased civil engagement and citizenship activities for both white students and students of color. Both white students and students of color expressed much greater interest in learning more about their respective demographic groups as a result of the training initiative (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). Diversity training initiatives in education were associated with improved problem-solving skills and increased creativity as well (Page, 2007).

Diversity training initiatives have also been linked to improved quality of health and mental health care. One diversity training initiative for university students was found to be associated with better self-reported health and fewer visits to physicians over a three-year period (Walton & Cohen, 2011). A meta-analysis examining the results of dozens of studies found that diversity training initiatives were effective in improving the clinical skills of mental health professionals to a level that would likely provide substantial benefits to clients (Smith & Trimble, 2016). Another meta-analysis study found that multicultural counseling skills in mental health care were significantly associated with improved client outcomes (Soto, Smith, Griner, Domenech Rodríguez, & Bernal, 2018), further supporting the importance of diversity training initiatives to improve those skills. Diversity training initiatives have also been helpful for advancing multicultural competence in providing medical care (Whitla, Orfield, Silen, Teperow, Howard, & Reede, 2003).

Finally, diversity training initiatives positively impact the quality of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), which in turn impacts our technological competitiveness. A study investigating the impact of diversity training on science found that, although diverse scientists positively impacted the field by being associated with innovative new ideas, long established STEM faculty often presented barriers that prevented diversity from flourishing in STEM fields (Hofstra, Kulkarni, Munoz-Najar Galvez, He, Jurafsky, & McFarland, 2020). Diversity training initiatives have also been used successfully to change the attitudes of male scientists toward female scientists to diversify the thinking and productivity of the field (Jackson, Hillard, & Schneider, 2014).

EVIDENCED-BASED UNDERPINNINGS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Two Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memoranda (M-20-34, M-20-37) and Executive Order (EO) 13950 on Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping describe Critical Race Theory (CRT) as “propaganda” that “teaches or suggests either: (1) that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or (2) that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil” (M-20-34, p.1). This claim lacks evidential support and demonstrates a clear misunderstanding and distortion of CRT and other theories related to racial injustice and diversity. In actuality, CRT illuminates the ways in which institutional systems and practices maintain the subordination and oppression of racial and ethnic minorities (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010;). Born out of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, CRT draws upon the works of civil rights leaders and activists to cultivate a “critical consciousness” that highlights the central role racism plays in maintaining power structures that privilege some and oppress many others. It differentiates “race consciousness” from racism and challenges the narrative that “colorblindness” is the same as “antiracism.” It does not, however, describe the United States as “inherently racist or evil,” nor does it attempt to “impose upon employees a conformity of beliefs in ideologies that label entire groups of Americans as inherently racist or evil.”

CRT allows individuals and institutions to examine antiquated beliefs and practices formulated over generations that perpetuate racism throughout society (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Crenshaw, 2011). For example, the Western value of meritocracy suggests that individuals receive benefit based on their work ethic. However, it neglects to consider the unfair playing fields on which individuals find themselves (e.g., inequitably resourced educational systems). This theory does not criticize meritocracy as a concept, but rather its application when justifying allocation of resources. Indeed, as mentioned in the EO, “all individuals are created equal and should be allowed an equal opportunity under the law to pursue happiness and prosper based on individual merit.” While these sentiments are noble, CRT explains that individuals are not treated equally due to the systems and structures in which they are placed. This theory elucidates how the social construction of race is used to systematically marginalize and disenfranchise others through micro- and macro- institutional and individual forms. It articulates how both conscious and unconscious racist beliefs and practices manifest, and how these elements have a cumulative effect on the individual and the larger group. CRT is a critical and valuable addition to our nation’s understanding of race and racism have operated throughout our nation’s history and continue to operate today. Psychology has sought to draw from CRT by describing race as a “conceptual lens” to view psychological science (Salter, 2013).

Rather than acknowledging this theory for its ability to reveal the hierarchical architecture of our society, invite critical examination of our beliefs and practices, and provide clarity on ways to move toward racial equity and healing, the recent OMB memos and EO

mischaracterize CRT with inaccurate claims and false narratives. In addition, the EO also distorts and weaponizes related concepts including *White privilege* (McIntosh, 1988), *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1995;2011), and *unconscious bias* (Dasgupta, 2013). White privilege refers to the benefits garnered based on the characteristics one is born with (e.g., skin color, physiological make-up) and contexts one is born into (e.g., high socioeconomic status, safe neighborhood). The association with Whiteness relates to the privileges afforded to White-identified (and White-appearing) individuals, as explained in CRT. At a concrete level, White privilege refers to the many aspects of life that White individuals have not asked for and do not have to think about (e.g., easily finding hair products and make-up that match your skin tone; believing that the police will protect you rather than mistake you for a perpetrator). This concept renders visible the benefits of being White (or White appearing); benefits that are so deeply engrained as truths that they melt into the background. Other aspects of diversity (class, socioeconomic status, gender/gender identity and expression, age, disability status, sexual orientation) can titrate up or down one's access to privilege, but White identity often adds an extra dose of benefit.

As stated above, access to privilege also depends on other aspects of one's identity. A person or group of people cannot be categorized by race, sex, or gender in isolation. Such perspectives are simplistic ways of thinking about the complexity of the human condition. Instead, it is the intersectionality of these aspects that contribute to one's privilege or lack thereof. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Cole, 2009) refers to the cumulative effects of simultaneously holding multiple oppressed identities, which magnify the social consequences (e.g., the multiplicative effects of not only being Black or being a woman but being a Black woman). This concept honors the complicated and multifaceted aspects of individual identities that exist within larger structures and systems that elevate some while denigrating others. While intersectionality often focuses on the compound effects of having multiple disadvantages, it can also speak to holding multiple privileges or a complex intersection of privileged and oppressed identities (e.g., older White woman with acquired disabilities). Intersectionality serves to highlight the complexity of holding multiple identities and the ways in which these identities interact with the person's socio-historical and political contexts.

CONCLUSION

Research findings on diversity training are clear – high-quality, evidence-based diversity trainings increase individuals' awareness of their own biases and the ways in which inequities can be reinforced within institutions and systems (SHRM,2020; Livingston, 2020). Such trainings increase competitive advantages for businesses, improve intergroup interactions, increase opportunities for understanding diverse viewpoints, and improve conditions for learning. Trainings improve the quality of services delivered to diverse populations, such as in health care settings and improve educational opportunities for all. In so doing, diversity trainings have improved the functioning of public and private organizations, including government agencies. Diversity trainings therefore have significant

benefits for the nation. The Administration's efforts to halt such trainings are based on unsubstantiated claims of bias that will allow broadly held societal stereotypes and biases to persist. What is needed is not a silencing of diverse perspectives, but rather more research on and application of proven training strategies to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, particularly in public sector settings. Investing in such efforts will improve government's ability to effectively serve all citizens.

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