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A FUTURE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY TRAINING: MOBILIZING DIVERSITY SCIENCE TO IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS

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In recent decades, diversity training has become a frequently used tool in efforts to reduce bias and increase inclusion in organizations. However, the effectiveness of diversity training has been called into question. The content and methods of diversity training programs vary widely, making it difficult to scientifically evaluate their effectiveness. Using a database of programs marketed to human resource professionals, we analyze advertised descriptions of 163 organizational diversity training programs and characterize their described content and methodologies. Our analysis generated themes about the ways training programs are designed to intervene (e.g., combating bias and stereotypes, fostering positive intergroup relations, reaping benefits from diversity), the goals they purport to achieve (e.g., bias reduction, cultural competence, increased productivity, employee satisfaction), and the forms the programs take (e.g., individual self-paced e-learning, live group training). Based on our analysis of what training providers promise and what research tells us such training can do, we discuss three key challenges to these programs' effectiveness in addressing organizational inequalities and to our ability to assess their effectiveness. We conclude by offering five recommendations to better align diversity training with the outcomes that providers and organizational leaders expect it to achieve.

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In U.S. organizations, diversity training—in the form of instructional programs designed to improve intergroup relationships through teaching and practice—is widely touted as a tool for addressing workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. The first diversity training programs emerged to mitigate employers' legal concerns following a 1965 executive order prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, and national origin by federal contractors (Dobbin & Kalev, 2013). Providers' approach to diversity training has since evolved from regulatory compliance (Edelman & Suchman, 1999) to a more market-based approach, where training is justified by the "business case" for diversity (Anand & Winters, 2008; Cox & Blake, 1991; Starck, Sinclair & Shelton, 2021). Market-based pitches claim that diversity is beneficial for financial performance and that diversity training integrates cutting-edge psychological research (e.g., on unconscious bias) into its programming. Furthermore, diversity science—that is, scholarly research that examines how psychological processes and intergroup relations shape one another (Esen, 2005; Kalinoski, Steele-Johnson, Peyton, Leas, Steinke & Bowling, 2013; Paluck, Porat, Clark & Green, 2021; Plaut, 2010)—has increasingly been integrated into diversity training as providers have developed, marketed, and sold these training products (Carter, Onyeador & Lewis, 2020; Dobbin & Kalev, 2013). Consequently, the United States has witnessed a multibillion-dollar surge in organizational diversity initiatives, accompanied by a corresponding increase in dedicated human resource (HR) roles to manage these efforts (Paluck, 2006; Pendry, Driscoll & Field, 2007).

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Despite the proliferation of provider-led diversity training, organization leaders, scientists, and journalists have raised questions about whether these interventions can effectively address organizational inequalities. Recent national headlines provide a case in point: "Are workplace diversity programs doing more harm than good?" (Coaston, 2021), and "To improve diversity, don't make people go to diversity training. Really" (McGregor, 2016). These pieces report on empirical evaluations of organizational diversity training programs that have produced mixed, nuanced, or relatively small effects (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry & Jehn, 2016; Chang et al., 2019; Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006). Some writers have simply concluded that "diversity training doesn't work" (Bregman, 2012: 1), or claimed that it is the "most expensive, and least effective, diversity program around" (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018: 48). Despite the misperception that all diversity training is the same, these programs actually vary widely, and little is known about the breadth of their advertised content and methodologies (Devine & Ash, 2022). The marketing claims surrounding such programs are likely to shape both people's expectations of the training and organizations' willingness to implement the programs. We contend that researchers are limited in their ability to evaluate diversity training programs' effectiveness if they do not know what the programs claim to do.

In this article, we identify discrepancies between what diversity training programs claim to achieve, what diversity science suggests diversity training can actually accomplish, and what the research literature indicates is most effective approach for changing organizational culture, structures, and practices. Our goal is not to examine the delivery of training, the experiences of trainees, or the effectiveness of the interventions; these are all well-trodden paths (see Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalinoski et al., 2013). Rather, our goal is to capture what diversity training programs are advertising and then assess, based on findings from the scientific literature, whether they are equipped to deliver on what they advertise. Without a clear connection between the advertised offerings and what research finds such training can actually accomplish, it follows that diversity training would be deemed ineffective. We conclude that it is not, in fact, clear that diversity training "does not work," but rather that its promises are misaligned with the outcomes that diversity training can actually achieve. We first characterize diversity training content and methodologies through analyses of 163 diversity training marketing descriptions from a database hosted by the Society for Human Resource

Management (SHRM), the largest professional association for corporate HR professionals.

Our analyses point to three key challenges of diversity training—exhibited in both its advertised content and methodology—that may hinder diversity training's ability to deliver on its claims and potential to address organizational inequalities: (1) a misalignment between what diversity training promises to do and what scientific research finds evidence for; (2) a focus on changing people, rather than on the role of organizations; and (3) a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

We then elaborate on these challenges and offer five recommendations to improve the alignment between diversity training practice and diversity science: (1) focus diversity training on what it does best (i.e., disseminating knowledge); (2) evaluate training based on outcomes that align with organizational goals; (3) move beyond "one-size-fits-all" programs; (4) expand training to teach about the role of organizations in perpetuating inequality, and give participants the tools to enact organizational change; and (5) embed training into broader organizational strategies. Rather than abandoning diversity training or deeming it a failure, to conclude, we chart a path for improving the efficacy of diversity training as a tool for organizational equality efforts.

Throughout this article, we refer to three distinct audiences that each influence the efficacy of diversity training in organizations. We identify *researchers* as those who produce peer-reviewed scientific research, and we use the term *science* to describe their findings about the effectiveness of diversity training programs and underlying theories. We use the terms *HR practitioner* and *organization leader* interchangeably to refer to those responsible for making decisions about diversity training, such as selecting providers and implementing programming within their organization. Finally, we use the term *provider* to describe individuals and businesses that develop, market, and deliver diversity training.

CHARACTERIZING DIVERSITY TRAINING AS ADVERTISED: METHOD AND FINDINGS

Diversity training encompasses instructional programs designed to improve intergroup relationships through teaching and practice (Lindsey, King, Hebl & Levine, 2015). It is broadly intended to facilitate positive group interactions, reduce prejudice and discrimination, and enhance the skills, knowledge, and motivation of participants to interact with diverse others (Bezrukova et al., 2016). In the United States alone, diversity training is a billion-dollar industry (Mehta, 2019). Thus, we limit our scope to U.S. training programs and contexts. As scholars have noted, diversity training varies greatly (Devine & Ash, 2022; Lindsey et al., 2015), and its design elements consist of many forms, shapes, and combinations (Bezrukova, Jehn & Spell, 2012). Some training runs as stand-alone sessions, where participants watch a video or complete a course online (see Chang et al., 2019), while other training involves a longer curriculum with multiple sessions (Bezrukova et al., 2012). Given the variance in diversity training content and methodologies, we sought to capture what diversity training purports to offer. To deepen our understanding of the advertised content, tools, and aims of organizational diversity training, we drew on a list of third-party providers of organizational diversity training programs.

Data and Sample

The SHRM is a global individual membership organization for HR professionals with nearly 325,000 members in 165 countries (SHRM, 2023a). Its members work in companies that are diverse in terms of industry and size. The top three member industries are services, manufacturing, and healthcare; 41% of SHRM members work in companies with more than 1,000 employees (SHRM, 2023b). In a recent survey of HR practitioners in the United States, over 80% reported that they read SHRM materials (Adler, 2023; Rosenfeld, 2021).

As the largest professional association for HR professionals, SHRM maintains widely used vendor directories for its members, including a directory of 163 diversity training programs in the United States (see Appendix A for additional detail). As HR professionals, SHRM members are typically responsible for researching, selecting, and implementing diversity training programs in their organizations. SHRM's wide recognition as a leading resource provider to HR professionals makes this directory an ideal sample for studying how diversity training is marketed to organizations in a corporate context (as opposed to governmental or healthcare settings). Both the SHRM membership and vendor directory are predominantly based in the United States.

To characterize how providers advertised the content and methodologies of their diversity training to potential clients, we created a database using public descriptions of training programs from SHRM's directory. We were unable to access and analyze the

full training content of each program, since many were blocked by paywalls or required a contract to engage, so we focused our analysis on providers' brief marketing descriptions of their diversity training. These descriptions often provide the only information available to potential consumers and tend to state what participants and organizations can expect from the training. This brief information typically includes an overview of the content covered, a claim regarding the benefits to organizations and employees, and an explanation of how the content will be delivered. For example, a diversity training program titled "Unconscious and Implicit Bias" (Full Circle Confidential Wellness, 2021) is advertised as follows:

> This workshop focuses on identifying the impact of implicit bias in the workplace and understanding the relationship between unconscious bias, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and discrimination. Specific methods and mechanisms for recognizing various manifestations of un-conscious, subconscious, and other hidden forms of bias are explored in depth using practical, workplace examples and drawing from real-life experiences. Participants learn evidence-based strategies for not only reducing and eliminating these forms of bias but how to utilize these experiences as opportunities for personal and professional growth and development.

Descriptive Text Analysis of Stem Frequency

Our first step was to examine what kinds of words were being used to describe and market diversity training programs. Using the brief descriptions of the 163 programs, we distilled words into their most common stems for text analysis. (See Appendix A for methodological details; data and code are available in our OSF project folder: https://osf.io/35w4h/?view_only=80e32bdd81a7486eb09d80d6ee3ecdf6.)

Findings about Prevalent Stems and Related Words

Figure 1 shows the 30 most prevalent word stems found across descriptions of diversity training programs, as well as related sample words for each stem.

As shown, the most prevalent stems—"divers" and "inclu," found in 52% and 50% of training descriptions, respectively—capture words around "diversity" and "inclusion." This suggests that our sample of diversity training descriptions is suitable for study. Although the majority of diversity training programs focus on such topics, they use these words differently in their training descriptions. Words associated with the most frequent stems describe both the content that training disseminates and the outcomes training aims to achieve. For example, words stemming from "inclu" and "divers"—like "inclusion" and "diversity"—are referenced as both learning objectives (e.g., "[this training] equips employees at every level to broaden their definition of diversity") and as descriptions of organizational outcomes (e.g., "building diversity in the workplace," "transform your culture into a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment"). Similarly, stems associated with bias and intergroup relations, such as "bias," "rac," and "cult," were among the 30 most prevalent word stems in our sample and are referenced as both training content (e.g., "science behind bias," "explore how race shapes our experiences," "[this training] examines the role of cultural competence") as well as broader outcomes expected from a particular training program (e.g., "help teams and individuals respond to bias," "have a common language with which to discuss race and ethnicity in the U.S.," "improve your cultural competency").

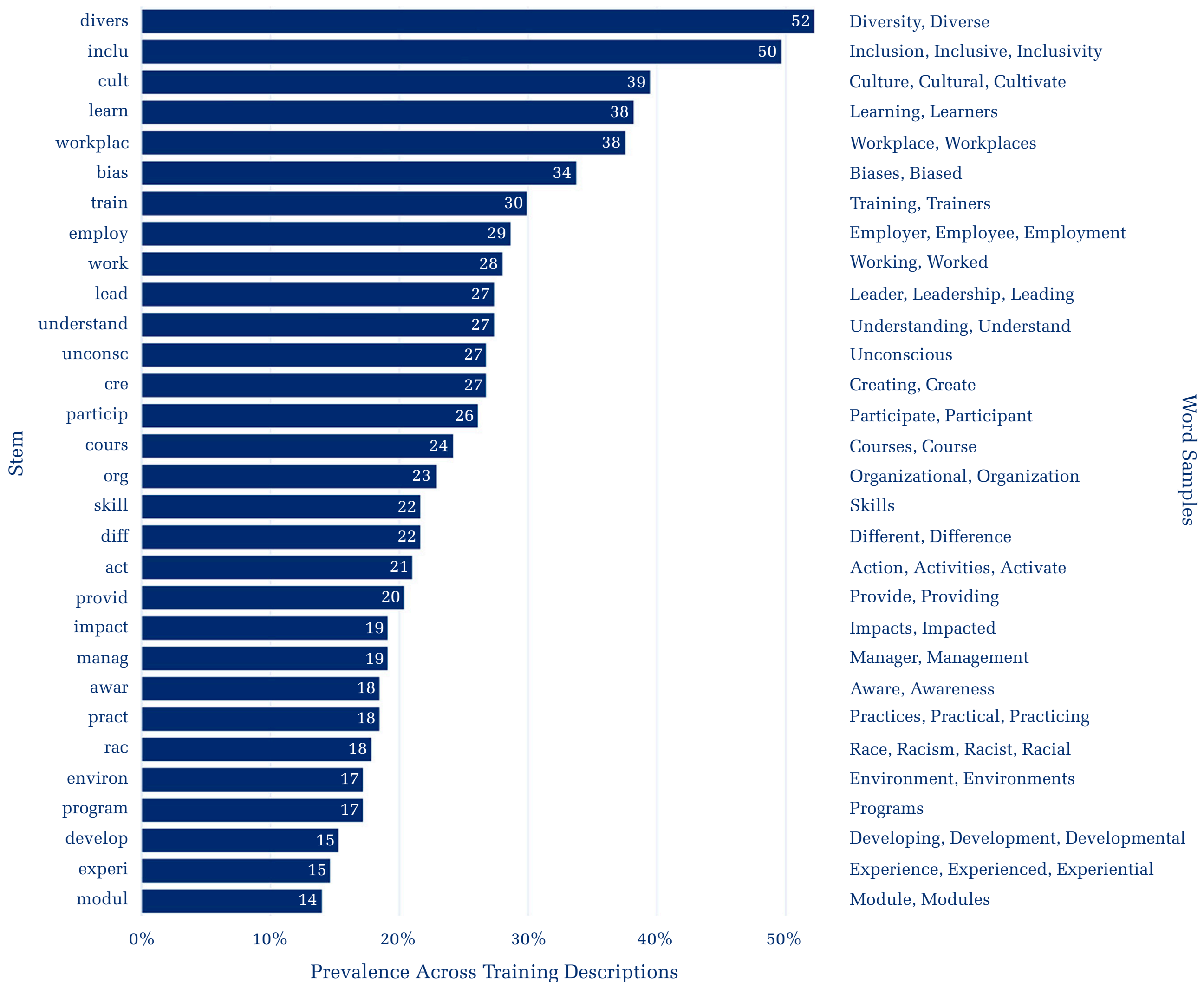
Further, words associated with prevalent stems characterize the landscape of training methodologies. For example, "learn" appears in 38% of descriptions, "program" appears in 17%, and "modul" appears in 14%. "Experi" and "pract" are also among the top 30 stems; these are associated with words such as "experience," "experiential," and "practices," and they appear in 15% and 18% of descriptions, respectively. Another set of prevalent stems—"cre," "develop," "employ," "lead," "manag," and "workplac"—point to training programs as vehicles to create workplace benefits. Over 75% of descriptions contain words that seem to characterize organizational development outcomes, such as "create," "developing," "employment," "leadership," "managing," and "workplace."

In all, our preliminary analysis unsurprisingly shows that diversity training programs aim to enhance diversity and promote inclusion (with the majority using this language) in organizations, often by specifically targeting bias through various learning methods. These descriptive findings offer evidence that our sample of advertised diversity training descriptions contains relevant information about the content and methodologies of organizational diversity training.

Qualitative Analysis

To deepen our understanding of diversity training's advertised content and methodologies, we

FIGURE 1
Characterizing the Descriptions of Diversity Training Programs



Note: "Average incidence in training descriptions" on the *x*-axis shows the percentage share of training descriptions that contain the stem at least once. Source: SHRM Diversity Training and Education Programs Vendor Directory.

qualitatively analyzed the 163 diversity training descriptions using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; see Appendix A for methodological details). We identified three overarching thematic coding schemas related to training topics and outcomes most frequently found in diversity training descriptions: *combating bias and stereotypes*, *fostering positive intergroup relations*, and *reaping benefits from diversity* (see Table 1). We also identified four coding schemas regarding the methodologies of diversity training: *teaching methodology, environment*, *offering options*, and *technology use* (see Table 2).

Findings about Advertised Diversity Training Content

Below, we define each of the aforementioned themes from our qualitative analysis. In Tables 1 and 2, we elaborate on the subcomponents (noted with italics), give examples from diversity training descriptions (noted with quotes), and report frequencies of these subcomponents (noted as a percentage of our sample).

Combating bias and stereotypes. The theme of *combating bias and stereotypes* broadly describes the focus of training on bringing awareness to—and

TABLE 1
Qualitative Codes of Content for Organizational Diversity Training in Practice

Thematic Coding Schema	Subcomponents	Examples from Training Descriptions	Percentage (%)[a]
Combating bias and stereotypes	Implicit bias	"This workshop focuses on identifying the impact of implicit bias in the workplace." "We will look at several ways of … helping your unconscious become conscious."	36
	Biases	"Help teams and individuals respond to bias in action." "Learners will look at how gender bias manifests in the working environment."	17
	Stereotypes	"We will begin to identify the development and perpetuation of stereotypes." "Helps counteract the shame, blame and stereotyping that create toxic environments and undermine productivity."	9
Fostering positive intergroup relations	Intergroup skills	"Employees learn to recognize, respond to and resolve situations that stem from differences." "The content focuses on understanding and identifying civility and incivility, responding to incivility, and what you can do to help foster civility in the workplace." "Participants will learn to recognize different types of exclusion and will practice several communication skills to create a more inclusive environment."	37
	Cultural competence	"The goal of this workshop is not to manufacture agreement, but to equip participants with the critical tools necessary to understand and respect our differences while dealing with cultural conflicts that often divide us." "After completing this course, participants will be prepared to work effectively within a multi-cultural team, understand different cultural interactions and become culturally competent."	25
	Shared vocabulary	"We provide a background in systemic racism by providing vocabulary and perspective on the various dimensions of racism, through a combination of personal narrative and examples of power dynamics." "Having a common language helps us to communicate better with one another, leading to a more inclusive environment for all."	15
	Social identity categories (e.g., race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age)	"Learners will have a common language with which to discuss race and ethnicity in the U.S." "Gender is front-and-center for all of us, all the time." "ABCs of LGBTQ."	32[a]
Reaping benefits from diversity	Productivity	"When this diversity is valued and leveraged, organizations have better outcomes with retention, morale, productivity, customer service, and profitability."	29
	Employee satisfaction	"This learning session will provide strategies to create an aware and inclusive culture that creates strong motivation and momentum for job satisfaction and performance."	14
	Compliance	"Ensure company policies are accurately reflected and appropriate contacts and protocol are incorporated." "This course focuses on real-life diversity situations that illustrate how exclusionary, disrespectful, and unprofessional behaviors can violate your organizational policies and even the law." "Our virtual program is designed for federal, state, and local compliance training requirements under guidelines of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the EEOC."	7

Notes: Our qualitative coding first gave rise to thematic coding schema, for which we then developed more nuanced subcomponents. Percentages indicate the share of training descriptions that mention each subcomponent methodology. Percentage total may not sum to 100 because subcomponents are not mutually exclusive. Source: SHRM Diversity Training and Education Programs Vendor Directory.

[a]Our qualitative coding found that specific social categories are mentioned in 32% of training descriptions. The social categories and associated percentages included in this subcomponent are as follows: race or ethnicity (noted in 20% of descriptions), "gender" (16%), "sexuality" (10%), "age" (6%), "disability" (4%), "religion" (2%), "class" (<1%), and "citizenship" (<1%). Note that social identity percentages do not sum to the subcomponent total because they are not mutually exclusive.

TABLE 2
Qualitative Codes of Methodologies for Organizational Diversity Training in Practice

Modality Coding Schema	Subcomponents	Examples from Training Descriptions	Percentage (%)[a]
Teaching methodology	Individual behavior change	"Participants will become more adept at navigating cultural and other differences between individuals in the workplace. By improving the quality of personal interactions among people with diverse identities, conflict will be reduced, making the workplace more efficient." "What to do if you're a target or witness of discrimination or harassment." "Better understanding of how to manage the assumptions they make about others, as well as look at the actions they can take to counteract bias in their own work environment."	74
	Knowledge improvement (building expertise on topics such as vocabulary definitions)	"The terms, tools, and frameworks covered in this module are an essential foundation for any aspiring culturally fluent ally." "Discover the difference between gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, sex, and pronouns. This module's emphasis on definitions, and how different identities can manifest, will equip you with the resources and tools to be an inclusive ally." "The course will teach learners what they can do to proactively support diversity and inclusion in their workplace and covers key definitions and concepts related to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion."	56
	Skills test (recitation, exam, element of passing a course)	"Pre and Post Tests are included." "Each participant will receive a certificate of completion when they pass the course."	13
Environment	Team training (group training, in person or virtual)	"[The training] is a 2-hour interactive and engaging program … We use a series of case studies and small group discussions to [generate] ideas about typical trends or behaviors that might occur in the workplace. We then [facilitate] conversation." "In this 90-minute virtual instructor-led training, up to 45 participants will work with facilitators to explore how bias functions in the brain and its impact on decision-making." "The following program is a series of interactive activities where participants are encouraged to share more about their experience, values, and beliefs. We do so by creating self and social awareness through scenarios and experiential learning activities."	51
	Independent training (individual, self-paced e-learning, or prerecorded webinar)	"Interactive e-learning courses available." "Individually-paced modules."	45
Offering options	Customized training (tailored to team, organization, or industry context)	"The program is designed to be customized to the organization's culture, needs, values, and beliefs." "From design to delivery, we focus on practical outcomes—tailoring courses as needed to address unique situations."	35
	Manager training (leadership and supervisor training, as opposed to less specific training for all employees)	"This course is designed to strengthen a supervisor's skills by helping participants overcome many of the challenges they may encounter as a leader." "[Our course] was designed as an introduction to Diversity Awareness, and to assist managers & supervisors create an equal opportunity workplace that is inclusive toward all employees."	25
Technology use	Live group training (in-person, on-site training)	"Trainers facilitate immersive and interactive onsite classes." "Through live, interactive, in-person sessions, provide foundational and advanced knowledge."	44
	Self-paced e-learning	"eLearning Courses provide online, 24-hour access to diversity education."	42
	Internet-based virtual group	"This virtual instructor-led training event."	29
	Webinar	"In this interactive, educational, training and webinar presentation."	3
	Virtual reality simulation	"Virtual Reality Training."	<1

Note: Our qualitative coding first gave rise to modality coding schema, for which we then developed more nuanced subcomponents. Percentages indicate the share of training descriptions that mention each methodology.

[a]Percentage total may not sum to 100 because subcomponent coding schema are not mutually exclusive, and not all training descriptions provide enough information to discern each methodology. Source: SHRM Diversity Training and Education Programs Vendor Directory.

attempting to disrupt—participant biases. This theme captures common the threads of "exposing" implicit bias, "identifying" and "addressing" individual assumptions, and "recognizing" stereotypes, which frequently cooccurred in training descriptions. In subsequent rounds of coding, we developed three more nuanced subcomponents of this theme, which are not mutually exclusive and together comprise the *combating bias and stereotypes* theme: (1) combating *implicit bias*, specifically mentioned in 36% of descriptions; (2) combating *biases* in general, noted in 17% of descriptions; and (3) combating *stereotypes*, found in 9% of descriptions. Providers appear to link stereotypes, implicit bias, and biases as topics that can be addressed together through training. Mentions of "implicit biases," which are highly durable attitudes and beliefs that are less accessible to conscious introspection and deliberate control (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), frequently accompany "bias" and "stereotypes" in training descriptions.

Fostering positive intergroup relations. The theme of *fostering positive intergroup relations* reveals training descriptions' focus on bridging differences between individuals in the workplace. Broadly, we identified four subcomponents of this theme: *intergroup skills* (37%), *cultural competence* (25%), *shared vocabulary* (15%), and *social identity categories* (32%). The *intergroup skills* subcomponent, coded in 37% of advertised text, includes learning appropriate responses to other people's behavior and maintaining "civil" workplace relationships through conflict-resolution strategies. The *cultural competence* subcomponent, noted in 25% of descriptions, includes references to cultural competency-building, such as "engaging with unfamiliar cultures," "cross-cultural training," and "multicultural workplaces." The *shared vocabulary* subcomponent, which we coded in 15% of diversity training descriptions, emphasizes the importance of learning definitions and building "common language" as the first step to creating inclusive environments.

Despite the relative brevity of each advertised training description, 32% of descriptions mention specific social identities in the context of fostering positive intergroup relations, which we captured with our *social identity categories* subcomponent. "Race or ethnicity" and "gender" identities are mentioned most frequently, appearing in 20% and 16% of descriptions, respectively. Other social identities, including "sexuality" (10%), "age" (6%), "disability" (4%), and "religion" (2%), are mentioned less frequently. "Class" and "citizenship" each appear in less than 1% of descriptions.

Reaping benefits from diversity. Finally, the *reaping benefits from diversity* theme emerged from descriptions that claimed the completion of their program increased productivity, enhanced customer satisfaction, or improved compliance with the law. Three subcomponents for this theme emphasize different benefits of diversity training: *productivity* (29%), *employee satisfaction* (14%), and *compliance* (7%). First, 29% of training descriptions referenced *productivity* benefits of completing the training, such as "[improving] outcomes for employees, communities, and the business" and "[ensuring] that you build and cultivate a talent-rich, diverse team or organization." The second subcomponent of *employee satisfaction,* referenced in 14% of descriptions, emphasizes the benefits of training for employees' satisfaction and experience, such as "help make their organization a more supportive and engaging place to work." The *compliance* subcomponent, mentioned in 7% of descriptions, captured references to reducing "lawsuits," violations of "organizational policies and even the law," and "legal responsibilities."

Findings about Advertised Diversity Training Methodologies

To shed further light on the marketed methodologies by which providers of diversity training purport to create organizational change, we classified four dimensions of approaches to diversity training (see Table 2): *teaching methodology*, *environment*, *offering options*, and *technology use*.

We first examined how providers claimed to achieve their stated learning objectives by qualitatively analyzing the *teaching methodologies* they said they used. This resulted in three subcomponents: *individual behavior change, knowledge improvement,* and *skills test.* Most training descriptions focus on *individual behavior change* (74%), with the majority mentioning the goal of *knowledge improvement* (56%), which includes learning definitions and concepts. Only a small proportion of training programs (13%) mention evaluating participants' post-training knowledge through some form of *skills test* or recitation.

We further coded the different training *environments* mentioned into two subcomponents: *team training* (51%) and *independent training* (45%). *Team training* includes live group training and interactive sessions using "experiential learning"

techniques. One stated: "The following program is a series of interactive activities where participants are encouraged to share more about their experience, values, and beliefs … by creating self and social awareness through scenarios and experiential learning activities." In contrast, our *independent training* subcomponent captures training in which participants work solo through an e-learning curriculum or workshop. We also noted two subcomponents of *offering options*, including whether the training is tailored to the team or organization (*customized training*, 35%), and whether the training is specifically designed for managers and emerging leaders (*manager training*, 25%).

Finally, our coding for *technology use* led to five subcomponents. Relative to *live group training* (44%, in which no use of technology is explicitly advertised), *self-paced e-learning* is the largest subcomponent at 42%. We coded three additional subcategories of *technology use* when diversity training programs are described as an *internet-based virtual group* (29%), a *webinar* (3%), or a *virtual reality simulation* (less than 1%).

In sum, our analyses yield several insights. First, diversity training programs focus on three broad themes: (1) combating bias and stereotypes, (2) fostering positive intergroup relations, and (3) reaping the business benefits of diversity. Second, diversity training appears to be focused more on changing the minds of individual organizational members—in terms of both the content disseminated (e.g., knowledge improvements) and methods of delivery and assessment (e.g., self-paced e-learning)—than on teaching participants about the role of organizations in perpetuating inequality or providing tools to change the organizational systems in which participants do their work. Indeed, just 3% of training descriptions mention a focus on systems or institutional change (e.g., "understanding the perceptual, institutional, and psychological processes"). Finally, training programs advertise a range of positive outcomes for groups and organizations, such as building inclusive cultures and enhancing productivity, but not one description discloses any potential risks to organizational consumers (e.g., employee backlash; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Legault, Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2011). In part, this likely results from the fact that the materials we analyze are brief and promotional. However, this too is part of our contention: these materials do not adequately reflect the likely consequences of diversity training—neither the benefits nor risks of these programs. In the next section, we mobilize the literature on diversity science to identify three challenges limiting the effectiveness of diversity training as it is currently advertised.

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY TRAINING

As noted earlier, little is known about the content and methodologies of provider-led diversity training (Devine & Ash, 2022). This lack of knowledge limits our ability to assess whether diversity training has the capacity to meet its advertised claims. We analyzed public marketing descriptions of diversity training and identified their claimed content and methodologies as reported in materials directed toward organizational decision-makers. Our examination of these descriptions revealed three challenges that may hinder diversity training's ability to deliver on its claims: (1) a misalignment between what diversity training claims to do and what scientific research finds evidence for; (2) a focus on changing individuals, rather than on the role of organizations; and (3) a "one-size-fits-all" approach to diversity training.

Challenge 1: Misalignment between What Diversity Training Claims to Do and What Scientific Research Finds Evidence For

One challenge that emerges from our examination of descriptions of diversity training is that they seem to overpromise what diversity training programs can deliver. The stem frequency analysis revealed that "bias" and "inclu" are two of the most frequent stems in the training descriptions (see Figure 1). As seen in our qualitative analysis (see Table 1), words deriving from these prevalent stems are in line with the *combating bias and stereotypes* theme. These words are often mentioned in claims that the training will halt or mitigate bias. But what reductions in bias or enhancements to inclusion is training likely to achieve?

Research shows that the largest effects of diversity training are detected in the reactions to the training itself (e.g., the likeability of the training and instructor; $g = .61$). Effects have also been noted in cognitive learning (e.g., knowledge acquisition about diversity topics; $g = .57$) and behavioral learning (e.g., developing skills, evaluations; $g = .48$). However, training appears to have a smaller effect on attitudinal and affective learning (e.g., attitudes toward diversity and self-efficacy; $g = .30$; Bezrukova et al., 2016). Despite broad claims that diversity training can reduce bias and promote subsequent behavioral change, these outcomes have proven to be some of the most difficult to produce (Lai et al., 2016).

Studies examining bias and behavior highlight the complexity of these changes. For example, Chang and colleagues (2019) find that a one-hour online training program produced behavioral change only for those who were already strongly supportive of women. For those less supportive of women, the one-hour online diversity training resulted in greater attitudinal support for women (e.g., support for policies designed to help women, willingness to acknowledge their own gender biases, and behavioral intentions to be inclusive toward women in the workplace) but no overall change in their behavior. Another example of how difficult it is for training to reduce bias comes from a six-year longitudinal study of non-Black physicians in training, which finds a negative relationship between reported number of hours of diversity training in medical school and positive explicit attitudes toward Black people measured in residency (Onyeador et al., 2020). Further, research examining the effects of diversity training on increasing representation—a critical step toward inclusion—across more than 700 organizations (e.g., the share of White women, Black women, and Black men in management) does not detect significant effects (Kalev et al., 2006). Thus, while it might be possible to reduce bias through training, expecting a measurable general reduction of bias rather than more nuanced effects may set the bar too high. Indeed, if the goal is bias reduction and increased inclusion over the long term, it seems that diversity training is set up to oversell and underdeliver.

The popularity of the business case for diversity (see Starck et al., 2021) may explain the high demand for diversity training (Georgeac & Rattan, 2022) and the tendency to overpromise what training can deliver. The business case for diversity claims that diversity is good for the bottom line: if organizations are not diverse or inclusive, they may lose out on profits for investors. Training is put forward as an easily implementable intervention to increase diversity, improve inclusion, and grow profits. In fact, however, the organizational investment required to produce increased diversity may reduce efficiency in the short term. Thus, the business case frame sets the expectation that diversity training will affect certain outcomes (e.g., profitability, efficiency) that may be at odds with other outcomes (e.g., increased diversity of hires, teams, and executives). Ultimately, diversity training programs may not be able to deliver all that they promise, fueling skepticism about their effectiveness and potentially hindering organizations from implementing them as one component of broader organizational change efforts.

Challenge 2: A Focus on Changing People, Rather than on the Role of Organizations

A second challenge is that diversity training descriptions focus more on changing individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors than on exploring how organizational contexts (e.g., structures, practices, and culture) produce and maintain inequality or how to enact change in organizations. Attributing inequality to the prejudice, bias, stereotyping, or discrimination of a "few bad apples" obscures the societal and organizational processes that perpetuate and maintain inequality (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022). This focus on people is evident in training content, including training that teaches concepts such as stereotypes, bias, and discrimination (see Table 1). It is also evident in methodology, as in the case of individual self-guided e-learning training (see Table 2). As we outline below, the focus on individual bias in diversity training content and methods may have the unintended consequence of obscuring broader, systemic drivers of inequality.

Diversity training that emphasizes *only* individual behavior may not adequately address specific organizational inequalities, which are produced by individual behaviors *and* organizational and societal policies and practices (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Indeed, broader social systems structure where people work and live, subsequently affecting patterns of social interaction that reinforce their individual thoughts, feelings, and actions. Some psychological research aims to reconcile individuals and the oft-imperceptible systems that impact their thoughts and day-to-day interactions (Banaji, Fiske & Massey, 2021; Salter, Adams & Perez, 2018; Shweder, 1990). For example, stereotypes are rooted not only in individuals, but in historical social systems (Salter et al., 2018). In short, attempts to reduce individual bias and shift stereotypes are merely one component of a wider array of interventions needed to transform organizations.

Several studies demonstrate how broader societal context powerfully shapes outcomes for members of underrepresented groups. For instance, national-level stereotypes predict girls' math performance (Nosek et al., 2009), Black students' standardized test scores (Chin, Quinn, Dhaliwal & Lovison, 2020; Pearman, 2022), and the harshness of punishment for Black students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Indeed, perceived social norms can also influence individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward underrepresented groups (Crandall, Miller & White, 2018; Miller & Prentice, 1996). For example, a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriage

shifted perceived norms and personal attitudes toward increased support for gay marriage and gay people (Tankard & Paluck, 2017). By illustrating the relationship between bias, perceived inclusion, and the broader social context, these studies suggest that focusing on individuals' biases is insufficient to achieve organizational change. Even for those who are highly motivated to attempt to shift their individual thoughts and behaviors, common cognitive processes—such as system justification; loss aversion; motivated reasoning; and errors of perception, attention, learning, and memory—can work against these efforts (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2009; Knowles, Lowery, Chow & Unzueta, 2014; Phillips & Lowery, 2020; Spears & Haslam, 1997). In sum, training that focuses on the roles of individuals *as well as* broader organizational and social systems in maintaining inequalities is likely to be more effective at reducing organizational inequities than training programs that focus on the role of individuals alone.

By failing to sufficiently acknowledge systemic influences on individual psychology and organizational structure, people-focused training may even reinforce individual attributions for organizational inequalities. At the organizational level, merely offering diversity training can create a false sense of progress toward addressing inequality, even if there is no evidence of change (Dover, Kaiser & Major, 2020; Leslie, 2019). Further, people-focused training approaches can direct attention toward drivers of inequality that are outside the organization's control (e.g., individuals' bias, recruiting pipeline; Leslie, 2019; Mobasseri, Kahn & Ely, 2023) and, in turn, deflect attention from factors that are within the organization's control (e.g., performance evaluations, promotion processes). At an individual level, diversity training can legitimize the bias and stereotyping of employees. Merely implementing diversity training can lead observers to believe that an organization values morality, equality, and diversity; as a result, training can lead people to legitimize unfair practices (Kaiser, Major, Jurcevic, Dover, Brady & Shapiro, 2013; Kirby, Kaiser & Major, 2015) or discount accusations of discrimination (Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018). Further, research shows that diversity training that discusses the automatic, unavoidable nature of stereotyping actually *increases* automatic stereotyping (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015). As shown in Table 1, diversity training programs place an outsized focus on implicit bias and automatic stereotyping (*combating bias and stereotypes*) in the hopes that awareness will improve the likelihood that individuals actually address these phenomena, but this approach is not supported by research. On the contrary, when instances of discrimination are blamed on implicit bias, people are less willing to hold discriminators accountable (Daumeyer, Onyeador, Brown & Richeson, 2019; Daumeyer, Onyeador & Richeson, 2020).

In short, we suggest that people-focused training may be less effective in producing the advertised outcomes of diversity training. Given that most advertised diversity training mentions neither the role of organizations in maintaining inequality nor how to use more comprehensive organizational change strategies implemented across multiple levels (e.g., individual, interpersonal, team, and departmental, among others), it is unlikely that instituting diversity training would lead to change in the policies and practices of organizations, which is exactly what is needed to produce the promised outcomes of diversity training advertisements.

Challenge 3: "One-Size-Fits-All" Approaches to Diversity Training

A third challenge is that many diversity training programs use a "one-size-fits-all" approach, such that a single program is designed to: (a) be delivered to different types of employees (e.g., those with differing motivations, biases, positional power), (b) address multiple organizational issues (e.g., hiring, representation, inclusion), and (c) improve the experiences of and outcomes for various underrepresented social identity groups (e.g., racial minorities, women).

There are several problems with a one-size-fits-all approach to diversity training. First, all employees are not the same; they likely have differing attitudes toward, and reactions to, diversity and inequality. One-size-fits-all training designed to appeal to the masses is likely to be less effective than training whose content and offerings are tailored to people's varying needs, baselines, and motivation to attend (e.g., diversity training has negative effects on the number of minorities in management; Kalev et al., 2006). As mentioned above, organizational leaders often make a business case for diversity training, which they assume will be acceptable to a large proportion of their employees. However, some employees may find this reasoning distasteful or instrumental, and instead might prefer a moral framing around the idea that diversity efforts are the right thing to do.

A one-size-fits-all approach to training also fails to acknowledge differences in people's motivations for

and attitudes toward equality (Ferdman & Brody, 1996; Lindsey et al., 2015). A focus on reducing bias toward members of underrepresented social identity groups makes diversity training less useful to employees who belong to these groups and can also force them to represent the broader group in ways that can be taxing (e.g., being called upon to share experiences of discrimination and mistreatment). Similarly, some employees are supportive of diversity efforts and others are less so; some employees have the power to implement structural changes and others do not; some employees have experience working in diverse environments, and for other employees this is new terrain. These factors should be considered when developing programming.

Diversity training can also produce unintended consequences—such as backlash or negative reactions—among participants who are either not motivated toward equality or are even motivated against it (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Legault, et al., 2011; Leslie, Flynn, Foster-Gimbel & Flaherty Manchester, 2023; Sanchez & Medkik, 2004). Such negative reactions can emerge from the threats to privilege, positional power, and social identities that diversity training may spark (Brown & Jacoby-Senghor, 2022; Iyer, 2022; Lowery, Knowles & Unzueta, 2007; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith & Kamdar, 2011; Phillips & Lowery, 2020; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). For example, compared to racial minorities, White participants are more likely to perceive multicultural concepts as exclusionary and thus to reduce their endorsement of diversity initiatives in response to them (Plaut et al., 2011). Further, emphasizing the benefits of diversity in concrete terms (e.g., multiculturalism) threatens many White Americans' sense of national identity and can breed prejudice (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). In short, by promoting inaction, insensitivity, and negative behaviors, such backlash can undermine the effectiveness of diversity training (Apfelbaum, Norton & Sommers, 2012; Apfelbaum, Sommers & Norton, 2008; Knowles et al., 2014; Ray & Purifoy, 2019).

Additionally, diversity training with a one-size-fits-all approach cannot engage deeply on the specific issues that hinder diversity in organizations, which face several wildly varying diversity challenges (Roberson, Kulik & Pepper, 2003). For instance, the issues that need to be addressed in the hiring process (e.g., ensuring a large enough applicant pool, standardizing interview protocols) are quite different than those that might need to be addressed to improve retention (e.g., mentoring, modifying the distribution of work opportunities), and neither issue is likely to be effectively addressed exclusively through diversity training. Indeed, few diversity training programs seem designed to target the specific challenges that organizations face (e.g., recruitment vs. promotion vs. retention). Instead, they focus on the broad topics listed in Table 1 (i.e., combating bias, enhancing productivity, and securing diversity's benefits).

Finally, a one-size-fits-all approach often attempts to reduce inequalities faced by many different groups simultaneously (e.g., people who are marginalized in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) (Bezrukova et al., 2012). For example, referring to "people of color" or pan-ethnic identity groups, such as "Asian" or "Latino," obscures significant differences between groups and can even erase specific historical wrongdoings (e.g., differences between Black and Asian experiences in the United States, the effect of caste for Indian organizational members). Although many marginalized groups and intersectional social identities share experiences of bias, prejudice, and discrimination, their group histories, the way in which inequities and inequalities manifest, and possible strategies for solving them are quite different (Martin & North, 2022). For example, acknowledging and discussing intergroup differences is an effective way to reduce bias and increase empathy toward racial minorities (Apfelbaum, Stephens & Reagans, 2016; Gündemir, Martin & Homan, 2019; Martin & Gündemir, 2023; Ragins & Ehrhardt, 2021; Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013; Todd & Galinsky, 2012). However, this same strategy backfires when it comes to reducing bias toward women (Banchefsky & Park, 2018; Koenig & Richeson, 2010; Martin, 2023; Martin & Phillips, 2017, 2019). Further, those who neglect Asians' and Latinos' specific national-origin identities are the target of negative emotions and poor evaluations (Flores & Huo, 2013). In short, the lived experiences of, stereotypes about, and nature of bias toward different marginalized social identity groups are distinct and thus require different approaches during training. By neglecting these realities, the potential effectiveness of diversity training is likely hindered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We offer five recommendations to amend the advertised claims of diversity training and improve their design, implementation, and evaluation. We recommend: (1) focusing diversity training on what it does best (i.e., content dissemination), (2) evaluating training based on outcomes that align with

organizational goals, (3) moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches (i.e., tailoring training to specific groups), (4) expanding training to teach about the role of organizations in perpetuating inequality and giving participants tools to enact organizational change, and (5) embedding training into broader organizational strategy. By rethinking the aims, content, and methodologies of diversity training programs, as well as approaches to evaluating their effectiveness, these recommendations aim to deepen our understanding of how future diversity training can best reduce organizational inequalities.

Recommendation 1: Focus Diversity Training on What It Does Best

Diversity training is most effective at improving and disseminating knowledge—for example, by teaching definitions and concepts, and building shared language among participants, as our qualitative analysis illustrates (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalinoski et al., 2013; Kulik & Roberson, 2008). As such, diversity training should be defined and marketed around what research demonstrates it can achieve: education and knowledge dissemination (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Onyeador, Hudson & Lewis, 2021). Further, training should include content *beyond* the all-purpose topics of individual stereotypes and biases. This added content should include the topics we share below in Recommendations 3 and 4, where we suggest tailoring training to specific organizational contexts and the needs of their members; as well as in Recommendation 5, where we suggest a focus on organizational change as part of a broader diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy. Organizational diversity training can provide information about the state of diversity in the organization and processes for reporting experiences of discrimination or mistreatment. Indeed, individuals, especially those in powerful organizational positions, are more likely to take action to address inequalities after learning clear, conclusive, and concrete evidence about bias, its negative consequences, and strategies to regulate it (Moss-Racusin, Sanzari, Caluori & Rabasco, 2018; Parker, Monteith, Moss-Racusin & Van Camp, 2018; Vitriol & Moskowitz, 2021).

Diversity training can also inform employees about differences in experience among various underrepresented constituencies through exposure to multicultural content. In particular, training can disseminate information about distinct political, cultural, and social histories; formation of identities; and power dynamics of underrepresented social groups. Training that exposes people to cultural content—for instance, through a one-day, small-group racial awareness workshop, a 20-minute slide presentation depicting multicultural content, or exposure to the experiences of colleagues from different social identity groups—can lead to a deeper understanding of diversity issues (Ellis & Sonnenfeld, 1994; Majumdar, Browne, Roberts & Carpio, 2004), greater tolerance of social differences (Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan & Wang, 2012), greater willingness to support diversity efforts (Awad, Cokley & Ravitch, 2005), growth in civic-mindedness during college (Cole & Zhou, 2014), and greater adoption of inclusive teaching practices among American college educators in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math fields (Aragón, Dovidio & Graham, 2016). However, whether such multicultural training content is associated with positive, negative, or mixed outcomes depends on how it is conceptualized, operationalized, and implemented in organizational contexts (Leslie & Flynn, 2022). In particular, the types of differences (Martin, 2023), goals (Hahn, Banchefsky, Park & Judd, 2015), and motivations (Knowles, Lowery, Hogan & Chow, 2009) highlighted through multiculturalism interventions can undermine (or enhance) their effectiveness.

Recommendation 2: Evaluate Training Based on Outcomes That Align with Organizational Goals

To rigorously evaluate the efficacy of diversity training, the stated aims of diversity training should be aligned with specific preestablished outcomes that the organization cares about and will actively measure (e.g., increasing hiring, improving retention, equalizing opportunities). For example, to address a lack of women in technical roles, an organization could implement a training program that focuses on the company's current hiring practices and investigates challenges stemming from existing promotion and retention policies that lead to this deficit. This training would be part of a larger series of diversity and inclusion efforts that address hiring (see Recommendation 5). Then, using assessment measures that are aligned with the specific goal of increasing the proportion of women in technical roles, the training could be evaluated in part using the company's hiring patterns—for example, the proportion of women interviewed, hired, and retained on teams that have completed training compared to teams that have not. To test for immediate and delayed effects, decay in effects, and potential backlash, we suggest that outcomes be identified and

measured before, immediately after, and over a period of time following training.

Recommendation 3: Move Beyond "One-Size-Fits-All" Programs

We also suggest that the content of diversity training be tailored to different audiences based on their motivations or perspectives on diversity (e.g., beginner, intermediate, or advanced motivation to reduce inequality). Training can be further specified to account for different pre-training experiences and attitudes among dominant and subordinated groups. These changes are key, as a lack of tailoring likely contributes to backlash (Leslie, 2019).

First, we recommend that training programs be tailored to their audiences to prioritize distinct learning needs. For example, the motivation for equity and organizational change varies widely among different social identity groups, often depending on how threatening equity and organizational change is perceived to be. If audience composition is not considered before training, potential perpetrators and potential targets of bias may be grouped together, despite disparate degrees of bias awareness (Perry, Murphy & Dovidio, 2015) and divergent needs in interracial interactions (e.g., White people's desire to be liked, and Black and Latino people's desire to be respected in interracial interactions; Bergsieker, Shelton & Richeson, 2010). Separate training programs for members of majority groups could discuss topics such as White guilt, identity threat, and tools for managing these experiences (e.g., emotion regulation; Ford, Green & Gross, 2022). Training for members of underrepresented groups could include topics such as mechanisms for coping with recurrent bias and discrimination reporting processes in their organizations. Notably, tailored, identity-driven training relies on providers' ability to draw on their own experiences and broker connections between other identities (Sugiyama, Ladge & Bilimoria, 2023).

It is important to note that some employees may have such strong threat reactions to diversity training content that they are unable to retain knowledge from the session (Jordan, Spencer & Zanna, 2003). Training for those who are less supportive of diversity could focus on making a basic case for the value of and need for diversity and inclusion, and teaching adaptive-processing strategies for difficult topics (Carter et al., 2020). Participants who are defensive toward training topics may also benefit from developing and working toward personal goals that are focused specifically on the areas they do value (Roberson, Moore & Bell, 2024). Meanwhile, training for those who are more motivated toward diversity could focus on strategies for working effectively in diverse groups, confronting bias, and instituting change.

Recommendation 4: Expand Training to Teach about the Role of Organizations in Perpetuating Inequality and Give Participants the Tools to Enact Organizational Change

We argue that diversity training needs to go beyond simply raising awareness of individual bias and discrimination. It should also educate participants on how to recognize inequality in all its forms in their organization, diagnose the sources of organizational inequalities, and take steps to change their organization. First, training providers should incorporate content that helps participants understand and identify the relationship between power structures and inequity and analyze how these structures benefit or disadvantage them. For example, providers can use experiential learning exercises such as "StarPower," which simulates power dynamics in organizations and society (Simulation Training Systems, 2023), or "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," through which participants examine the links between Whiteness, White privilege, White supremacy culture, and their relationships to these concepts (McIntosh, 1988). Such content can include an analysis of how historical patterns contribute to systemic inequities, how power hierarchies are both sustained by and reinforce present inequities, and how participants can understand the implications of their own positions in this interlocking system (Bonam, Nair Das, Coleman & Salter, 2019; Hideg & Wilson, 2020; Nelson, Adams & Salter, 2013; Onyeador, Daumeyer, Rucker, Duker, Kraus & Richeson, 2021).

Second, training can teach participants how to assess and analyze organizational inequalities. Identifying policies and narratives that produce and perpetuate inequalities—such as "merit-based" evaluation and compensation policies (Castilla, 2008; Castilla & Benard, 2010), "color-blind" team norms (Carbado & Gulati, 2000), and the work–family narrative and the persistence of gender inequality (Padavic, Ely & Reid, 2020)—are a critical first step in diagnosing persistent organizational inequities. Training can also help participants determine which organizational outcomes (e.g., hiring, inclusion, promotion) are important to focus on when diagnosing inequalities. Assessing possible organizational changes and scrutinizing who has

power over those parts of the organization is key to this analysis.

Lastly, training can teach participants tools for implementing real organizational transformation. For example, training might identify and help interrupt internal narratives that inadvertently suppress certain experiences. In this example, an organization may extol a narrative about gender equity among senior leaders while ignoring the experiences of women in the junior ranks. Training could disrupt this incomplete narrative about gender equity by exploring, amplifying, and codifying experiences of all women in the organization (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Ewick & Silbey, 1995). Likewise, firms that publicly denounce racism and lean on the American narrative of racial progress may not leave room for their employees to critically examine and recognize existing discrimination in the workplace (Kraus, Torrez & Hollie, 2022). Training can offer an alternate narrative of racial progress that acknowledges structural racism and progress that remains to be made, and can create space to discuss individual experiences (Kraus et al., 2022). Such training programs may help participants learn how to diagnose inequity and find ways to amplify underrepresented voices while staying vigilant to the reemergence of patterns and policies they seek to interrupt.

Recommendation 5: Embed Training into Broader Organizational Strategy

Embedding diversity training into a broader organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy is critical to addressing organizational inequalities. An organization's strategy details its primary purpose and those of its subunits (e.g., departments, teams); for example, bookstores exist to sell books, schools to provide education, hospitals to provide care, and so on (Miller & Rice, 1967). As stewards of organizational strategy and culture, leaders can embed diversity training into the organization's strategy by offering employees reasons to undertake the complex work of dismantling inequalities. These reasons should be aligned with the primary purpose of the organization and its employees' work. For example, leaders of an offshore oil platform embedded training into their strategy to prioritize the goal of collective well-being (vs. production goals), which offered employees a compelling reason to make organizational changes toward equality (Ely & Meyerson, 2010). Driven by safety concerns, organizational training helped employees decouple stereotypically masculine traits (e.g., macho, aggressive) from definitions of competence (Ely & Meyerson, 2010). Embedding diversity training into organizational strategy can invite all employees into the work of advancing equality, reinforcing their commitment to diversity and making it easier to hold the organization accountable (Nadella, Shaw & Nichols, 2017). Consistent with this recommendation, past research has shown that diversity training is most effective at reducing organizational inequalities when it is embedded in broader organizational efforts (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Correll, 2017; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; 2018). For example, in their comprehensive meta-analysis of diversity training, Bezrukova and colleagues (2016) found that training that used integrated approaches were more effective (g = .57) than those that used a stand-alone approach (g = .36). Thus, when diversity training is coupled with organizational practices, such as adopting formal policies against discrimination or improving specific HR management policies, it tends to be more effective (Bendick, Egan & Lofhjelm, 2001; Bezrukova et al., 2016).

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The efficacy and utility of diversity training has increasingly been challenged in the academic literature and the popular press. Yet, little is known about the advertised content and methodologies of diversity training, which shape participants' expectations for and experience of training, as well as organizations' willingness to implement it. We argue that researchers will be limited in their ability to evaluate diversity training's effectiveness if they do not know what diversity training claims to do for individuals and organizations. Thus, it is premature to simply conclude that "diversity training programs are ineffective." To catalog the variety of advertised content and methodologies of diversity training, we investigated how diversity training is publicly described to potential clients. As expected, our quantitative snapshot of diversity training descriptions showed that the majority of training aims to enhance diversity and promote inclusion. This confirmed that our sample of advertised diversity training descriptions contained key information about the content and methodologies of organizational diversity training. Our primary analysis was qualitative, which yielded several themes: three related to the content of diversity training—*combating bias and stereotypes*, *fostering positive intergroup relations*, and *reaping benefits from diversity*—and four

related to the methodologies of diversity training—*environment*, *teaching methodology*, *offering options*, and *technology use*.

Based on these analyses, we enumerated three challenges that might undermine diversity training's ability to deliver on its claims: (1) a misalignment between what diversity training claims to do and what scientific research finds evidence for; (2) a focus on changing people, rather than on the role of organizations; and (3) a "one-size-fits-all" approach to diversity training. To address these challenges, we made five recommendations to organizational leaders, providers, and researchers that, if implemented, could improve their capacity to address organizational inequalities: (1) focus diversity training on what it does best—namely, disseminating knowledge by teaching definitions and concepts; (2) design and evaluate training based on outcomes that align with organizational goals; (3) move beyond one-size-fits-all programs; (4) expand training to teach about the role of organizations in perpetuating inequality and give participants the tools to enact organizational change; and (5) embed training into broader organizational strategy.

Although we defend the value of diversity training for educational purposes, we want to be clear that instituting diversity training is not enough. To create lasting organizational change, changing individual minds is necessary, but not sufficient. Public statements describing diversity training's basis in and reliance on scientific research (e.g., "[Our] workshops are based on social science research," "using research and case studies," "we work through research-informed best practices") suggest that training providers seek guidance and backing from research, and, through this article, we chart a program for providers and researchers to help improve diversity training as a tool for change. First, in concert with providers and organization leaders, researchers must seek more effective ways to assess existing diversity training. Take, for instance, Chang and colleagues' (2019) large-scale and longitudinal evaluations of diversity training programs in real organizations. Rather than examining the efficacy of diversity training immediately after it takes place, they followed up 20 weeks later to examine whether diversity interventions had long-lasting effects. Second, providers and scholars must work together to develop training curricula and delivery methods that organizations will respond to and that will realistically contribute to lasting change. Indeed, we hope that researchers will empirically test our recommendations and those of others (Carter et al., 2020; Mobasseri et al., 2023; Onyeador, Hudson & Lewis, 2021) so that the guidance offered to providers is itself scientifically evaluated. For instance, it would be useful for researchers to investigate whether and how tailored diversity training reduces backlash relative to one-size-fits-all programming. Additionally, it would be useful for researchers to test the efficacy of training that engages with structural context in organizations and subsequent changes of these structures post-training.

While we have emphasized the roles that researchers, HR professionals, and providers play in improving the efficacy of diversity training as a tool for organizational change, we must also note at least two constraints they are likely to face in moving this important work forward. First, limited resources, of both time and finances, constrain the design, implementation, and evaluation of diversity training. For instance, HR professionals often must justify the use of employee time and funding on diversity training. Scholars are also constrained by limited research funding, making the type of ambitious large-scale longitudinal field research we suggest difficult to pursue. Second, providers, organizational leaders, and researchers have different incentives for improving diversity training. For example, researchers are incentivized to maximize academic publications, whereas most organizations, including diversity training providers, are incentivized to maximize profits. Thus, aligning the incentives of researchers, organizations, and providers may prove useful, not only for the benefit of sharing ideas and expertise but also for mitigating the constraints each group may face on their own.

Our research is not without limitations. First, both the training in the database and the research we draw on is centered on the United States. As such, these insights are most applicable to U.S.-based efforts. Research has shown that people's endorsement of and reaction to diversity approaches vary as a function of national diversity policies, immigration, and intergroup relations (Guimond et al., 2013; Hahn, Judd & Park, 2010). As such, more research is needed on diversity training across cultures broadly to assess whether these recommendations will be helpful in non-U.S. contexts. Given the diversity of intergroup dynamics around the world, deeper investigation in other countries and cultural contexts is vital. Further, our findings are limited to the types of diversity training we studied based on a vendor database from SHRM, which may not have included other types of training aimed at improving diversity, equity, and equality in organizations—for instance,

training about managerial practices or other organizational change efforts. Lastly, our research only examines the content of brief, publicly available diversity training advertisements and offerings, and not the actual content of the diversity training, the experiences of participants, or the more in-depth promotional materials that are available upon request. We can also only speak to training offered by third-party providers (through their public marketing materials) and not training offered or designed by HR professionals within organizations. These represent important and promising avenues for study, which we hope future research will explore through multi-method research designs that include both quantitative and qualitative methods. For instance, researchers with greater access to the participant experience of training content can draw on participant interviews, focus groups, and direct observation of training sessions to build on our exploration of the impact and effectiveness of this training.

Although the promise of diversity training may have been overstated, we can improve the implementation of this useful tool by refocusing training on what it can do best—educating participants. By committing to rigorously evaluating what works and what does not, organizational leaders can meaningfully and confidently incorporate them into broader strategies for organizational change.

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APPENDIX A

Data and Sample

The SHRM directory included 105 diversity training vendors as of October 2021. After we excluded 57 seemingly defunct firms and individual consultants who did not specifically offer diversity training, the resulting sample included 163 diversity training programs from 48 unique firms. Using this list, we navigated to each vendor website and collected the product name and description of each unique diversity training program offered. We did not limit description length. Note that the SHRM Vendor Directories are dynamic, as vendors can sign up for free to be listed and can remove themselves at any time. It is at SHRM's discretion to categorize vendors into particular vendor directories. These categories are also subject to change.

Qualitative Analysis

Two members of the research team independently read through the descriptions of each diversity training program in the sample database and tracked initial themes. They then, using an inductive grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), coded each training description, emphasizing the following descriptive and thematic coding buckets: topic area, claimed outcomes, and methodologies. After establishing the coding buckets, the researchers completed a secondary round of coding to further refine the coding schema. In response to comments raised during the peer review process, we completed a third round of coding to further refine subcomponents of the *combating bias and stereotypes* theme.

Text Analysis

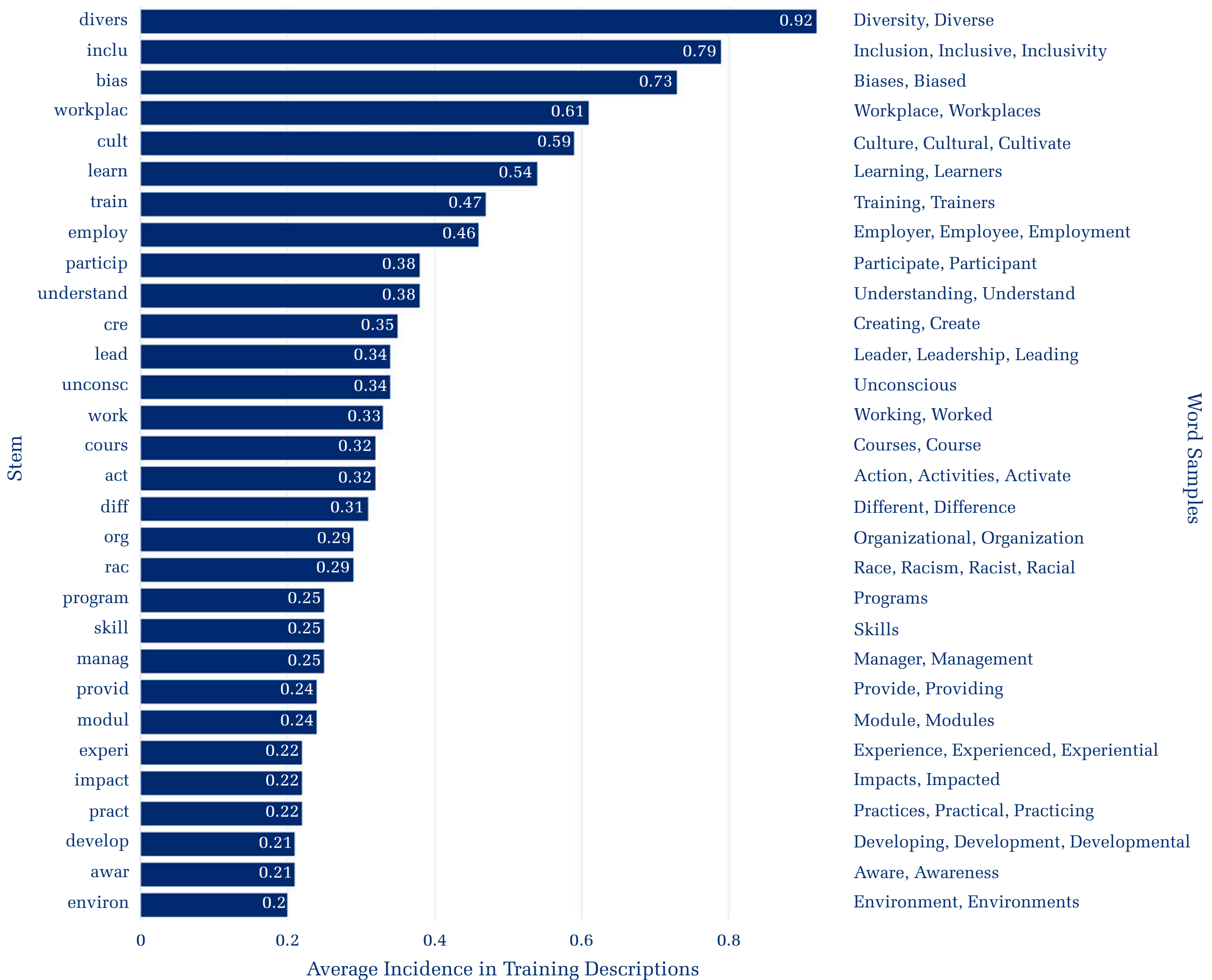
The advertised descriptions of training programs were brief, ranging from 2 to 255 words, with an average of 69 words. We processed the text by removing prefixes (e.g., intra-) and suffixes (e.g., -ing, -ed) to distill words into the most common stems, which are the roots that carry lexical meaning (Paice, 1990). For example, the stem "divers" encapsulates a number of words, such as "diversity," "diverse," and "diversify," and captures the root meaning of diversity (i.e., differing, distinct, or of various kinds). We then analyzed 1,138 stems across all 163 training descriptions to identify the most prevalent stems and sample words found in descriptions of diversity training programs.

We used simple natural language processing to broadly characterize the text of diversity training descriptions. We processed the text by tokenizing each training description into unigrams (one-word sequences), removing special characters and stop words (e.g., “a,” “the,” “is”), and distilling the corpus into the most common stems using a Lancaster stemming method (e.g., the part of a word carrying lexical meaning; Paice, 1990). Our final corpus contained 1,138 stems.

Figure 1 in the manuscript depicts the 30 most prevalent stems found in descriptions of diversity training, as well as sample words for each stem. Prevalence is the percentage share of training descriptions that contain the stem at least once.

Figure A1 depicts the number of times, on average, a word stem appears in each training description. By looking at the data in this way, we can examine the word stems that most frequently appear across the entire dataset and consider word stems that may appear multiple times in a single description. “Prevalence across training descriptions,” on the *x*-axis, is the frequency with which a word stem appears in descriptions of diversity training across the entire dataset. For instance, Figure A1 shows that the stem “divers” appears most frequently in the dataset—on average, appearing 0.92 times per document. Data and code are available in our OSF project folder (https://osf.io/35w4h/?view_only=80e32bdd81a7486eb09d80d6ee3ecdf6).

FIGURE A1
Word Stem Frequency by Average Incidence in Training Descriptions



Note: Source: SHRM Diversity Training and Education Programs Vendor Directory.