

THROUGH THE LENS OF ADMISSIONS STAFF AND FACULTY REVIEWERS: HOW
IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING MAY MITIGATE BIAS IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS
PROCESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Sabrina Lynn Capps

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Laura Jones, EdD, Committee Chair

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session while working at a higher education institution. The theories guiding this study were Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (TPB) and Bandura's theory of social learning. Both theories discussed how individuals may act in certain circumstances based on their social interactions, prior behaviors, and upbringing. What are the perspectives and lived experiences of admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training at a public higher education institution? The research study was conducted using a qualitative research design with a transcendental phenomenological approach to capture the desired information. The sample population studied were individuals who are working or have worked in college admissions and faculty who review (or have reviewed) applications for an admissions decision. Data collection methods included a questionnaire, documents from training sessions, and individual interviews. Data analysis methods included transcription of interviews and coding software that identified common themes and categories. This research study found that while institutions understand the importance of such trainings, institutional administrators do not provide in-depth training opportunities meant to arm employees with strategies to mitigate biases within their institutional roles. More specifically, they are not providing specialized, face-to-face training opportunities for college admissions staff and faculty to discuss and implement strategies to mitigate documented and observed implicit biases within the college admissions process.

Keywords: implicit bias, explicit bias, unconscious bias, diversity, admissions, experiences, affirmative action (AA)

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Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to God for providing me with the wisdom and strength to complete my doctoral journey.

To my husband, Kevin, who has been my greatest supporter, encourager, and solid rock. Without his love, support, and unwavering faith in my abilities, I would not have completed my doctoral program.

To my sweet cat, Sophie, who provided warmth, cuddles, and emotional support during countless nights of researching and writing.

To my parents, who instilled the importance of education into my brain as a youngster and always believed in me.

To the memory of my grandmother Vera, who always believed in my abilities to accomplish big things.

To the rest of my family and friends for always supporting me in my goals and celebrating my achievements with me.

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List of Abbreviations

Affirmative Action (AA)

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI)

Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ)

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter provides background information on the topic of implicit bias/unconscious bias and associated training sessions and includes a historical, social, and theoretical perspective on the topic. An identified gap in the current literature is explained in detail along with the purpose of the study. Following the purpose statement, the significance of the study, specific research questions that are rooted in the theoretical framework, and terms and definitions that will be used throughout the manuscript is explained. Lastly, a summary provides a recap of all sections and detail specific reasons and the importance of why such a study was needed.

Background

This section of the chapter provides background information on implicit bias within the higher education industry and, more specifically, information on implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training on and off institutional campuses. The first sub-section provides the historical context behind the topic of implicit bias and implementing university implicit bias training sessions, workshops, and programs. The second sub-section provides information on how implicit bias impacts higher education and the people who work in the industry. The third, and last, sub-section provides some theoretical context for the concepts and principles that have surfaced within the research.

Historical Context

From the historical perspective, limited access to education has been a topic of discussion and a source of contention that dates all the way back to the early 1900's (Bowen et al., 2006). Back in the 1980's, some issues surrounding access to education focused on inequality and were predominantly income-driven (Adiseshiah, 1980). Adiseshiah also noted that the educational

system promoted inequality in several ways including geographical location, gender, and income. By the 1990's, Black individuals had made significant progress in obtaining access to education, mandated by law; however, access to specific educational opportunities were few as opposed to educational opportunities provided for White individuals (Vergon, 1990). Research conducted back in the year 2000 on ethnic monitoring, described as a way to track patterns and progress of specific groups of people, has been used to help underrepresented minorities gain access to higher education institutions (Van Dyke & Gunaratnam, 2000).

The phrase *implicit bias* represents the invisible thoughts and perceptions that individuals may possess regarding certain groups of people or situations (De Houwer, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2018). As a result of an increasing number of implicit bias cases across the country in recent years, efforts have been made in organizations and institutions to combat individual implicit biases from permeating their respective environments. One approach to combat the phenomenon was to bolster the use of implicit bias training sessions across a variety of industries (Kidd et al., 2022). Within implicit bias training sessions, workshops, or programs, individuals are made aware of their implicit bias and how their biases may affect those around them. Some training sessions and workshops may provide strategies to mitigate bias; however, many implicit bias trainings are developed to merely create awareness (Sabin et al., 2022).

Social Context

In the social context of implicit bias and associated training sessions, workshops, or programs, the impact is widespread. As mentioned above, all internal and external stakeholders are not immune to implicit bias. University professors and students have felt the impact of implicit bias both inside and outside of the classroom. More specifically, implicit bias of admissions officers and faculty reviewers may be the most detrimental to the university

admissions process. If admissions officers are making acceptance or denial decisions, their implicit bias could have a significant impact on the decision-making process (Hardy, 2020). If these university employees are not made aware of their implicit biases and provided with strategies to mitigate their biases, excellent prospective students may be denied the opportunity to pursue a college degree. Additionally, the ramifications of such a decision based on admission employees' personal judgments could result in lawsuits for discrimination.

Theoretical Context

Considering that there have been numerous studies conducted on implicit bias over the last few decades, previous researchers have leaned on various theories to underpin their studies. Fujimoto and Härtel (2017) used an experiential learning theory to develop an organizational diversity learning opportunity that would assist employees in discussing different perspectives in a safe environment where participants could learn from others' experiences and perspectives. A constructionist theory of emotion was used in a study that investigated negative effects toward a specific group of people (Lee et al., 2018). In a 2019 study conducted on the effects of an online diversity training intervention experiment, the researchers used the theory of planned behavior to determine how behavioral changes take place (Chang et al., 2019). Peterson and Stewart (2020) utilized the social identity theory, which aimed to help reduce individual biases within the psychology of cross-cultural organizations. All the studies cited herein have investigated various aspects of implicit bias, individual behaviors associated with the effects of implicit bias, and how negative thoughts and behaviors influence decisions. The theories guided the researchers to unique insights about implicit bias.

The completed study leaned on two theories that assisted in determining how individual behaviors contributed to implicit bias in a general sense, but more specifically, how individual

thoughts and feelings influenced implicit biases within the university admissions process and if such behaviors can be predicted. The results, findings, and conclusions drawn from the completed study may help in identifying potential implicit biases in other universities and assist educational administrators in improving professional development training opportunities that will effectively address implicit/unconscious bias across departments on campus.

Problem Statement

The problem is that while implicit bias has been documented within the university admissions process, those involved in the process are not provided with an outlet or a professional development opportunity in which to develop potential solutions. If admissions staff and faculty who review applications for admissions decisions were given the opportunity to express their thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and ideas surrounding implicit bias via a training session, the problem could have real solutions that others may adopt. A quick search on the internet revealed opinion pieces from various authors indicating that implicit bias is a hot topic in the university admissions realm; however, research is scarce in terms of bias or diversity training experiences of faculty and staff who are immersed in the university admissions process. Identifying and using various strategies to reduce implicit bias should begin with the understanding that the topic is sensitive and applies to all industries across the globe (Teall et al., 2019). In the higher education sector, implicit bias or diversity training sessions should provide faculty and staff with appropriate strategies to reduce negative implicit thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and curricula should be developed for students to aid in understanding how their implicit biases affect others and how to mitigate their biases (Bowen, 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2021). Individuals employed within an admissions department or faculty members who review

applications for admission into programs may feel that attending an implicit bias training is a waste of time if suggestions are not provided to assist them in mitigating implicit bias attitudes.

Much of the current research on university implicit bias training sessions has been focused on creating awareness of implicit bias as well as the overall effectiveness of training sessions. Many training sessions cover a wide array of areas within the subject such as racial bias, gender bias, age bias, and even appearance-based bias (weight); however, little research has been conducted on their personal experiences. A transcendental phenomenological study investigating the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers was needed to add to the growing body of literature on the topic.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session (in-person or online) while working at a higher education institution. At this stage in the research, implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions will be generally defined as professional development opportunities meant to create awareness of implicit bias and to be a catalyst for changing attitudes and/or university policies. The theories that guided this study were Ajzen's (1991) theory on planned behavior and Bandura's (1971) theory on social learning as both theories discussed how individuals may act in certain circumstances based on their social interactions, prior behaviors, and upbringing.

Significance of the Study

Understanding university implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions, workshops, or programs from the viewpoint of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers

contributed to the existing body of literature in several ways. Insights and experiences gleaned from participants may change the landscape of the college admissions process by targeting specific first-hand examples witnessed by the participants themselves. The next few sections provide information on the theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives that the study sought to contribute to the existing knowledge base on the topic.

Theoretical

From the theoretical perspective, the study added to the knowledge of the various theories used in previous research studies such as the experiential learning theory and the constructivist theory of emotion, which also highlighted how bias can affect decisions. Since implicit bias is ingrained in everyone, understanding where their implicit bias may stem from could help individuals both in their professional and personal lives. For this study, insights obtained from admissions staff and faculty reviewers can assist other individuals within similar departments in changing learned negative behavior or outward biases that may be detrimental to student or university success.

Empirical

In the empirical sense, the results and findings of this study added to the relatively few studies on lived experiences on the topic of implicit bias (Javier et al., 2022; Lincoln & Stanley, 2021; Okorie-Awé et al., 2021). While we do know that implicit bias has been found in many areas and professional development training sessions have been developed to create awareness of implicit bias, we did not know how the participants were impacted by these training sessions or if what was discussed in those trainings had any relevance to the college admissions process. There was certainly not enough empirical evidence to draw any conclusions on whether lived

experiences are similar or if faculty and staff attendees had different experiences from everyone else.

Practical

Practically speaking, this study could have a significant impact on university admissions processes. Considering the previous research that has been conducted on implicit bias in the university admissions process that has impacted both staff and students (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Hardy, 2020; Maxfield et al., 2019), a study of this nature with admissions staff and faculty reviewers as participants was critical to preserving the equality and fairness that a university admissions process requires. Prospective students and their families will have a better peace of mind surrounding their choices of institutions to which to apply and know that the institution has put forth the effort in establishing and maintaining fairness and high ethical standards within their college admission processes.

Research Questions

The research questions have been derived from and aligned with the theoretical framework that guided the study along with the problem and purpose statements. The research questions listed specifically focus on university admissions staff and the faculty members who review applications for a decision. The central research question and the sub-questions are answered in the findings, results, and conclusion of the research study.

Central Research Question

What are the perspectives and lived experiences of admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training while working at a higher education institution?

Sub-Question One

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive their social interactions and upbringing to influence their experiences during and after the implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions?

Sub-Question Two

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive their experiences of implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions should drive policy changes within university admissions processes?

Sub-Question Three

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions have impacted their mindsets or behaviors regarding their roles in the college admissions process?

Definitions

The terms listed below are frequently referenced throughout the existing research and the completed study. The definitions are taken directly from the current body of literature on the topic.

1. *Admissions process* is the process by which admission offices use to determine student acceptance in relation to set criteria, policies, and reviews of college applications (Bastedo et al., 2018).
2. *Admissions staff* is defined as a group of employees who evaluate college applications and determine admittance in a university (McMican & Comiska, 2023).
3. *Affirmative Action* is a policy developed in 1961 by John F. Kennedy to highlight racial inequality for specific groups (Bateman & Long, 2020).

4. *Diversity* includes many facets of humanity such as nationality, race, gender, sex, color, age, and even political beliefs (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020).
5. *Diversity training* is defined as using various approaches to disseminate skills or knowledge that will facilitate and foster inclusiveness within an organization with a diverse population (Pendry et al., 2007).
6. *Epoche* is Greek word meaning that everyday perceptions, attitudes, and judgments should be set aside (Moustakas, 1994).
7. *Explicit bias* is the conscious awareness of one's implicit bias and choosing to act on those specific attitudes (Daumeyer et al., 2019).
8. *Faculty reviewers* are faculty members who review college applications to render an admissions decision. See also *Admissions Staff* (McMican & Comiska, 2023).
9. *Implicit bias* is subconscious, unintentional judgments that individuals make about other individuals or groups of people (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Also referred to as *unconscious bias*.
10. *Implicit bias training* is a workshop or program designed to identify unconscious negative thoughts and perceptions of individuals that may influence inappropriate behavior (Applebaum, 2019).

Summary

Within the existing body of literature on the topic of university implicit bias training sessions, workshops, and programs, a gap was identified within the populations that have been recently studied. The population within higher education that has been neglected within the research was the admissions staff and faculty members that review applications for admissions decisions. Investigating and understanding their lived experiences of attending a university

implicit/unconscious bias or diversity training session, workshop, or program has closed the gap in the research and provides solid evidence of specific departmental experiences. In addition, the purpose of the study was to understand the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit/unconscious bias or diversity training session while working at a higher education institution. From the perspectives of theoretical, social, and practical significance, the lived experiences of admissions staff and faculty reviewers who attended such training sessions have helped to modify negative behaviors, be a catalyst for behavioral change in others, and mitigate any biases that exist within the university admissions process. The research questions derived from the theoretical framework and aligned with the problem and purpose statements specifically focus on university admissions staff and faculty reviewers. The answers to those questions in the findings, results, and conclusions provided a comprehensive understanding of not only how university implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training sessions transformed the participants' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the training and their respective roles, but also added their personal and professional experiences to the existing literature on such a sensitive topic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides a thorough review of the existing literature related to the various aspects of implicit/unconscious bias. The first section details two of the relevant theories for exploring human behaviors and social learning through interaction with others. The theories ultimately guided the completed research study and provided the importance of using the theories to explain and understand the implicit bias phenomenon through the lens of admissions staff and faculty reviewers in the college admissions process. The second section contains a synthesis of the current literature, which provides a plethora of information on implicit bias, what it is, and how it permeates every aspect of higher education. This section also includes the rationale behind why implicit bias training sessions are needed and implicit bias training formats, goals/objectives, evaluation, and effectiveness. Finally, the last section of the review provides a summary of the previous research and identifies the gap in the literature. The identified gap in the literature provided the rationale and validation as to why this study was needed.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of research, studies employ the use of theoretical frameworks to guide the research. In other words, researchers use theoretical frameworks to convey their values to readers and provide a rationale for how the research study will add to existing empirical studies (Collins & Stockton, 2018). A theoretical framework seeks to provide a pathway for researchers to uncover many new things within a research study (Garvey & Jones et al., 2021). The theory or theories chosen provide a foundation on which the entire study is constructed (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Garvey and Jones (2021) also indicated that a theoretical framework is a useful map and can provide a way to discover new ideas and new perspectives. Many theories develop over time and new concepts or ideas may surface as a result (CohenMiller & Pate, 2019). Researchers caution about the potential for an increase in bias if the theoretical framework is not carefully chosen (Heng, 2020). The qualitative approach of a research study should be considered when choosing an appropriate theory or theories to guide the study (Garvey & Jones, 2021).

Theory of Planned Behavior

According to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, individual behaviors can be predicted based on the person's intentions or attitudes toward a specific issue. The TPB contains three motivational factors that play a role in a person's behavior: attitude, subjective norms, and the perception of behavioral control (Kruse et al., 2018). Based on the results of a certain behavior, one can glean additional information such as outcomes, the impact of the behavior on others, and factors that played into the behavior (Ajzen, 2020). Ajzen (1991) argued that the magnitude of a person's intentions, attitudes, or motivations may control whether the person will exhibit a specific behavior and to what extent. Ajzen (1991) noted that the stronger the intentions and attitudes are toward a specific issue, situation, or behavior, the stronger the indication that an individual will exhibit the desired behavior. The TPB can be used to explain certain behavioral decisions and may highlight the attitudes and intentions of individuals in any given situation (Fan & Pan, 2019).

Theory of Social Learning

Bandura (1971) posited that behavior can be learned through direct experiences and observations of others and suggested that behaviors are learned by examples or "modeling" in which people imitate the behaviors of others. Based on the characteristics of the social learning

theory, behavior must be learned before it can be carried out (Bandura, 1971). Bandura noted that people commonly believe that behaviors can be influenced by positive or negative reinforcements. Desired behaviors can be manipulated based on the consequences of individual actions and behaviors in any given situation. Through a brief review of the social learning theory, Falk and Kim (2019) noted that individual learning is predominantly shaped through the examples of others either by choice or by accident. Based on the premise of the social learning theory, negative behavior toward one or more social groups may stem from childhood, which would be considered discrimination (Over & McCall, 2018). Furthermore, based on observational learning, individuals should consider the notion of visual culture and the role it plays in their behavior (Yilmaz & Yilmaz, 2019).

Theoretical Integration for Research Studies

Considering that both theories above involve past behaviors, patterns, and social interactions during every stage of life, the use of these theories guided the study to aid in helping participants understand how their behavioral traits, characteristics, and ingrained thoughts have played a part in their current attitudes. Participants recalled experiences or learned behaviors in their childhood years that provided insight to their behaviors as an adult, which contributed to implicitly biased thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Participants were hyperaware of their previous thoughts and behaviors and predicted how they behaved or thought in various situations. If they can predict how they may act in any given situation, they can control their biases and prevent their implicit biases from becoming explicit biases. Behavioral questions were asked in the data collection methods that relate to these theories regarding past behaviors and social interactions and data analysis uncovered patterns of thinking and undesired behaviors.

Using Ajzen's (1991) TPB in a study investigating university implicit bias training programs helped in determining the attitudes and intentions of attendees before, during, and after a training session. Future researchers using this theory may be able to automatically identify those who are excited to learn more about the topic as well as anyone who may be closed-minded and unwilling to learn about their possible biases. For closed-minded individuals, an implicit bias training session may open their eyes to how their biases impact others and can change their attitudes and behaviors accordingly. Motivations for attending an implicit bias training session differed among faculty and staff; however, the result of mitigating biases was the intended goal.

Understanding faculty and staff motivations for attending and participating in such training sheds some light on the behaviors that were exhibited before and after the implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training session, workshop, or program. For implicit bias issues in higher education, leaning on Bandura's (1971) social learning theory pointed to the notion that individuals observed biased behaviors early on to imitate those behaviors later in life. Reinforcement of such behavior depends on the group of individuals with which one is associated. Faculty and staff attendees that participated and engaged in an implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training session, workshop, or program changed their behavior as they observed others being conscious of their implicit bias and made substantial, outward changes in their interactions with diverse groups.

Related Literature

This section provides a synthesis of the existing literature surrounding the topics of implicit bias including the types of biases, college admissions, affirmative action, and professional development training sessions. The related literature section concludes by

identifying a problem in the literature and linking the current literature to the identified gap in the current research. The goal of this section is to provide readers with a detailed look at not only what has been examined regarding implicit bias training sessions, but to also identify the gap within the research and to identify a problem to further the understanding within the existing body of knowledge. The results and findings of the study added to the existing research surrounding implicit bias within the college admissions process and provided real-world solutions to mitigate the phenomenon from the experiences of participants in implicit bias professional development.

Implicit Bias Explained

Implicit biases are defined as subconscious, unintentional judgments that individuals make about other individuals or groups of people (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Implicit (unconscious) bias is an invisible, uncontrolled power within individuals that causes them to act inappropriately (De Houwer, 2019). Implicit biases can include stereotypes and prejudices about a particular group of people (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). The implicit biases of individuals may be so deeply rooted that the individual may not even be aware that the biases exist (Pollock et al., 2022). Individual implicit biases are commonplace and have been described as the catalyst of negative behaviors (Maxfield et al., 2020). Theories surrounding implicit bias operate under the presumption that individuals with a high capacity for bias equate to a high chance of discrimination against a certain person or group of people (Vuletich & Payne, 2019).

Diversity includes many facets of humanity such as nationality, race, gender, sex, color, age, and even political beliefs (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020). Implicit bias is a term that has been used to illustrate the challenges of diversity and inclusion (Onyeador et al., 2021). On the other hand, explicit bias can be defined as the conscious awareness of one's implicit bias and

choosing to act on those specific attitudes (Daumeyer et al., 2019). As a result of an individual's biased thoughts, feelings, or perceptions, discrimination could be a potential outcome, regardless of whether the bias is implicit or explicit (Santee et al., 2022). Being aware of individual implicit bias is important; however, preventing inwardly biased thoughts and perceptions from becoming explicit biases is of the utmost importance.

Types of Implicit Biases

Considering that implicit bias is defined as a subconscious, unintentional judgment that an individual can make about another individual or groups (Gonzalez et al., 2018), this means that implicit biases cover numerous areas. In other words, a person may have negative, unintentional thoughts regarding any aspect of another person or a group of people, and can include race, gender, weight, age, and sexual orientation. The various biases have been discovered in prior research and have implications that biases may have been reduced, but not eliminated. Previous research on each type of implicit bias regarding these areas is detailed in the next several subsections.

Racial Bias. The topic of race has become increasingly controversial over the last several decades with numerous research studies conducted on various aspects of race. Examples of racial bias can be found in various areas within the workforce. A review of three separate studies across different industries involving racial bias found that African Americans were victims of implicit racial bias and discrimination (Cooley et al., 2018; Fuller, 2021; Gunarathne et al., 2022). Additionally, the results of two studies out of the three strongly suggest that organizations and companies are not doing enough to mitigate or eliminate racial bias and more strategies should be developed (Cooley et al., 2018; Fuller, 2021). An additional study conducted on the disparities between tipping for African American service workers versus White service workers

appeared to have slightly contradicted previous studies mentioned above where African American service workers were tipped more, but only in certain scenarios; however, the authors also suggested incorporating various strategies to mitigate racial bias (O'Rourke et al., 2022).

Considering that racial bias permeates every industry across the globe, the higher education industry has also documented racial bias (Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020). As evidenced previously, several studies have investigated racial biases between Whites and African Americans (Cooley et al., 2018; Fuller, 2021; Gunarathne et al., 2022; O'Rourke et al., 2022). In a college or university setting, similar studies have been conducted to determine racial bias instances among undergraduate students (Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020; O'Rourke et al., 2022). One study conducted among 1st-year undergraduate students resulted in a finding, which suggested that there were no statistical differences between White students and Black Minority Ethnic groups stereotypical beliefs and that most students were against hate among themselves (Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020). This finding seems to contradict some studies that found racial bias against African American individuals while, at the same time, confirming the validity of the findings of another completed study (Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020; O'Rourke et al., 2022). While the authors concluded such a finding, one could argue that the study appeared to contain author bias due to how they classified the White students and indicated they were privileged (Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020).

Gender Bias. Based on the current research in different areas, implicit bias regarding gender is extremely prevalent in higher education (Hoorens et al., 2021; Mitchell & Martin, 2020). Researchers have concluded that implicit bias does exist within the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics areas (Kisfalusi et al., 2018; Salehi et al., 2019). It has been noted that mindsets on gender biases may be shifting and awareness of attitudes and actions are being

redirected in a more positive direction (Judson et al., 2019). Recent research has concluded that implicit gender bias in the form of stereotyping or the threat of stereotyping is also prevalent in higher education where women are seen as least likely to pursue math or accounting-related degrees simply because they are not seen as capable of being successful in those fields (Nabil et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020). Additionally, it has been found that teachers who possess implicit biases directly affect their performance within the math field between genders (Carlana, 2018). Furthermore, the way students view their instructors, and their general expectations demonstrate the influence on student evaluations of their instructors and institutions should develop strategies to integrate fair evaluation practices (Adams et al., 2021). Similarly, the general expectations teachers have of their students, their beliefs about certain students, and behaviors exhibited inside the classroom may affect their biases (Doornkamp et al., 2022; Protivínský & Münich, 2018).

Because gender bias is prevalent within higher education, institutions must develop strategies that will help students and teachers become more aware of their implicit biases and negative attitudes along with how their biases affect others (Bowen, 2019). For students, this also means that implicit bias curricula should be developed to address the growing bias phenomenon along with evaluations to ensure that the curricula are effective (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Although some decision-makers have been adamant that they are not gender biased, their biases were obvious (Régner et al., 2019). As evidenced in prior studies, gender bias is alive and well. Institutions and organizations should do more to create awareness of implicit bias along with developing strategies and policies to mitigate or completely eradicate gender bias.

Weight Bias. Negative attitudes or thoughts that surround a person's weight are known as weight biases (Winters & Johnson, 2022). It is important to note that weight bias can play a

major factor in the health of those who are targets of weight bias (Peterson & Savoie-Roskos, 2023). Friedman and VanPuymbrouck (2019) noted that biases against obese individuals may be deeply ingrained and could be exposed by intentions when working with obese people. Obese individuals report discrimination and bullying, and such acts have created a stigma against overweight people, resulting in weight bias (Brewis et al., 2018). Institutions or organizations that have anti-bullying policies regarding weight may lower the instances of weight bias (Lessard & Puhl, 2021). Although organizations aspire to treat all individuals equally, both implicit and explicit weight biases continue to exist (Oliver et al., 2020). Individuals who are overweight are also subject to scrutiny and discrimination within institutions of higher learning (Alexander & Alexander, 2021). To mitigate weight bias, sensitivity training sessions or learning activities are needed to educate individuals on the perils of weight bias as well as provide solutions for individuals to put into practice what they have learned because of training sessions or activities (Essel et al., 2022; George et al., 2019; Oliver et al., 2020; Winters & Johnson, 2022). Students, especially in the medical field, often want to mitigate their own biases in their respective fields to provide the highest level of care and customer service and attempt to ask administrators for the necessary resources (Essel et al., 2022; Friedman & VanPuymbrouck, 2019). Some research findings suggest that not enough tools and resources are available for reducing implicit bias in individuals, particularly within the healthcare field (Peterson & Savoie-Roskos, 2023).

Age Bias. In modern society, people tend to possess a negative view and a pattern of prejudice against older adults and the process of aging (Ackerman & Chopik, 2020; Giasson & Chopik, 2020). Furthermore, environmental factors may contribute to general assumptions that people make about aging (Giasson & Chopik, 2020). Age-related biases may result in unequal treatment that stems from certain characteristics of this population (Fatfouta & Ghoniem, 2021).

Ackerman and Chopik (2020) noted that individuals who felt discomfort and uncertainty surrounding their understanding of aging and older adults tend to harbor more negative attitudes toward the older generation. Age bias has been predominantly found within the employment sector and has been the subject of studies surrounding the hiring processes and practices within organizations (de la Fuente-Núñez et al., 2021; Keskinen et al., 2023; Naegele et al., 2019). Some research findings refute prior evidence that age bias exists within the hiring process and imply that interviewers obtain so much information from a candidate that there is no room for biased thoughts to play a part in their hiring decision (Naegele et al., 2019). While much of the research focuses on the older adult population, age bias against younger individuals does exist and policies should be developed to aid in creating awareness of age bias towards the younger generation (de la Fuente-Núñez et al., 2021). Research also suggests that although older adults have been the primary focus of age bias, they are also skilled at creating their own strategies for resilience when faced with bias due to their age (Keskinen et al., 2023).

Sexual Orientation Bias. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals have been the target of bias in recent years (Kim et al., 2022; Morris et al., 2019; Snyder & Henry, 2023; Weise et al., 2023). Scholars note that sexual orientation bias has racism roots and stems from White privilege (Kim et al., 2022). Some scholars also report that implicit and explicit bias is systemic based on measures of both types of bias (Snyder & Henry, 2023). Individuals that identify with this population may not report incidents of bias for fear of consequences and institutions or organizations were not ready to handle the needs of this population (Weise et al., 2023). People in the LGBTQ community need to be involved in discussions inside the classroom to facilitate understanding and develop strategies for inclusiveness and reduce bias (Morris et al., 2019).

Preventing Implicit Bias

Efforts have been made in organizations and institutions to combat individual implicit biases from permeating their respective environments (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020; Kidd et al., 2022; Onyeader et al., 2021). The prevention of implicit bias can include delayed interactions with others in an effort to mitigate stereotypes (Rivers et al., 2018) or employ the use of implicit bias training sessions to create awareness of biased thoughts (Kidd et al., 2022). Identifying and using various strategies to reduce implicit bias should begin with the understanding that the topic is sensitive and applies to all industries across the globe (Teall et al., 2019).

Affirmative Action

Affirmative Action (AA) can be described as a policy intended to highlight and prevent racial inequality of specific groups and was coined back in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy (Long & Bateman, 2020). Several states have prohibited the use of AA in various industries such as employment and education, which stemmed from court cases and legislation (Long & Bateman, 2020). Like the definition provided by Long and Bateman (2020), Petts (2021) stated that AA is defined as policies or programs that intend to provide preferential treatment to groups that have been excluded in the past. Organizations have implemented several AA policies in hopes of reducing the effect of bias within their organizations (Foley & Williamson, 2018).

In the context of higher education and since the inception of AA policies, some universities have afforded minority groups several advantages of being accepted into their respective universities (Bleemer, 2023). In some institutions, quotas for enrollment must be met and AA policies have assisted in universities hitting their enrollment goals (Basant & Sen, 2019). Over the years, the concept of AA has evoked a negative response, but this may be due to perceptions of preferential treatment of specific groups rather than policies that are intended to

prevent racial inequality (Petts, 2021). Additionally, while the goal of AA is to reduce the social inequality of marginalized groups, the perception of the policy is negative in general (Sinclair & Carlsson, 2019). Mello (2022) indicated that it is important to understand the lasting effects that AA will have on academic performance and success in the workforce.

In modern-day society, higher education institutions are becoming more selective (and getting richer) due to the number of prospective students graduating from high school (Sulé et al., 2022). In terms of the college admissions process, which will be covered in subsequent sections, higher education institutions that utilize AA policies will typically review a prospective student's background to determine if they are part of an underrepresented minority or have been part of a broader disadvantaged group (Warikoo & Allen, 2019). Warikoo and Allen also noted that AA policies used in higher education admissions are not confined to American universities, but universities around the world. AA policies were developed to reduce or eliminate inequality in terms of educational access, academic performance, and retention rates that lead to graduation (Mello, 2023).

Universities that use AA policies to boost enrollment of underrepresented minorities versus universities in states in which AA use has been prohibited have shown varying degrees of success and failure. Findings from recent research surrounding university enrollment appeared to be at odds in connection with AA policies. Enrollment appeared to decrease because of prohibiting AA policies (Bateman & Long, 2020) whereas enrollment increased when AA policies were being used (Bleemer, 2023). The conclusions suggest that AA policies work and boost university enrollment. In both studies, the universities also researched the use of alternatives to AA but determined that the alternatives only slightly increased enrollment of individuals from unrepresented minorities. It is noted that higher education institutions should

remain focused and committed to developing strategies to effectively combat inequality (Sulé et al., 2022).

Implicit Bias in Higher Education

Considering implicit bias is not a new concept, many articles, opinion pieces, and research studies have been written and conducted on this subject. Because implicit bias may be learned at an early age and unaware of the phenomenon, individuals may carry their implicit bias through their entire educational journey (Bandura, 1971). Addressing implicit bias with students or teachers may be challenging since individuals may not be comfortable sharing their internal feelings surrounding the topic (Sukhera & Watling, 2018). In the realm of higher education, a search of the current literature reveals numerous examples of implicit bias and associated qualitative and quantitative studies conducted on various aspects of implicit bias (Hakkola & Dyer, 2022; Kogan & Schoenfeld-Tacher, 2017; Nakamura, 2021; Santee et al., 2022). Both students and faculty have participated in research studies on implicit bias in and out of the classroom and studies may range from anywhere along the lines of chemical undergraduate students' understanding of implicit bias (Nakamura, 2021) to implicit bias potentially playing a role in faculty searches (Hakkola & Dyer, 2022). Furthermore, the criteria used in the hiring process of faculty vary across institutions and includes potential implicit bias as it relates to the promotion and tenure of faculty members (Pieper & Krsmanovic, 2022).

College professors have the overwhelming task of attempting to educate students on implicit bias and its effects (Kogan & Schoenfeld-Tacher, 2017; Santee et al., 2022). Previous research studies involving student participation seem to be at odds with one another. For example, one study required nursing student participants to complete a survey anonymously in class thereby decreasing their stress level because they did not have to make decisions on a real

patient (Santee et al., 2022) whereas in another study, student participants were in a real-world service-learning class where they were forced to make quick decisions (Kogan & Schoenfeld-Tacher, 2017). In comparing these two studies, one could interpret these statements as contradictory due to the activities that the students completed. Furthermore, it may be difficult to lean on one or the other for the most accuracy in the results and findings.

Just as students participate in research studies to identify and address implicit biases, faculty members from various areas of education also do the same (Davey et al., 2021; Fan et al., 2019; O'Meara et al., 2020). Faculty members not only participate in research studies that address implicit bias within the classroom but also participate in research studies that address implicit bias in other areas such as faculty recruitment (O'Meara et al., 2020). Universities struggle to implement bias-reducing strategies for diverse faculty recruitment despite the growing literature on the subject (Davey et al., 2021). One specific area where faculty are up against implicit bias is in evaluations from their students (Fan et al., 2019). Research studies conducted in implicit bias within student evaluations of their instructors seem to revolve heavily around gender bias (Fan et al., 2019; Hoorens et al., 2020; Mitchell & Martin, 2020). Recent studies have shown that students preferred their male instructors over their female instructors, rated men higher, and showed more bias against their female instructors (Fan et al., 2019; Hoorens et al., 2020; Mitchell & Martin, 2020). Research studies that intend to focus on implicit gender bias should consider various discoveries and utilize several different methodologies and analyze the data in different ways (Klein et al., 2019).

College/University Admissions Process

A college or university admissions process typically refers to the formal procedures used to accept or deny a prospective student. The general process involves an application for

admission, which contains various sections regarding basic demographic information, previous educational history, preferred major, and several specific documents that are required to be reviewed. These documents could include a high school or previous college transcript, test scores, letters of intent, recommendation letters, writing samples, resume, essays, or evidence of extracurricular activities (Rosinger et al., 2020). For colleges and universities that offer bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees, there are two different types of admission processes. Individuals outside of higher education may understand the structure of undergraduate admissions and may believe that the graduate admissions process is the same; however, the two admissions processes operate quite differently (Pieper & Krsmanovic, 2022). For bachelor's degrees, prospective students will go through the undergraduate admissions process. For advanced-level degrees, prospective students will go through the graduate admissions process.

Undergraduate Admissions

Undergraduate admission typically refers to individuals who are either graduating from high school or transferring from another college and seeking to enroll in a college or university to pursue an associate degree or bachelor's degree. Undergraduate students fall into four categories or levels: freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. The undergraduate admissions process generally consists of a formal college application, submission of a high school transcript with a grade point average (GPA), and official test scores from an academic assessment (University of North Florida, 2024). Many colleges and universities have a minimum required GPA and testing score used in determining a prospective student's success within the preferred program. Most colleges and universities review undergraduate applications with a predetermined

set of criteria and the admission or denial decision-making is the responsibility of the undergraduate admissions staff (Pieper & Krsmanovic, 2022).

Other colleges use a holistic approach, which will typically consist of an essay or letter of intent detailing reasons why the prospective student is interested in a specific major and supplemental materials such as recommendation letters or a list of extracurricular activities (Hossler et al., 2019). Additionally, undergraduate admissions staff may also research an applicant's high school to determine the quality of the school as well as the academic composition to aid in making an admissions decision (Nicola, 2022). Colleges and universities that use a holistic approach have been increasing in recent years, which will generate a crucial business need for institutions to be clear and specific about what factors they are using to make an admissions decision in the undergraduate admissions realm (Bastedo et al., 2018; Hossler et al., 2019; Talkad et al., 2018). A further review of holistic admissions will be detailed in a subsequent section.

Graduate Admissions

Like the undergraduate admissions process, the graduate admissions process contains many of the same requirements, however, admission into a graduate program can be more rigorous and require more documents depending upon the program of choice. To be considered for a graduate program at a college or a university usually requires the complete application packet to be reviewed by graduate admissions staff and committees that consist of faculty members within a specific program. Generally, a graduate admissions packet will contain a prospective student's formal application to the institution, an application fee, official college transcripts, recommendation letters, official assessment scores such as the GRE or GMAT exam, a letter of intent or a personal statement, resume or curriculum vitae, or an interview with faculty

(UNF Graduate School, 2024). Once a prospective submits all required documents, their application packet is sent to members of the department and program to which the student applied for a formal review of all materials.

The review of graduate applications may differ from program to program at various institutions. Due to the highly specialized concentrations of graduate programs, faculty members will typically review the applications submitted to their programs (Peiper & Krsmanovic, 2022). Some departments may only require the department chair to review the application for a decision while others may employ the use of faculty committees to render a decision for applicants. As part of a review process, some college and university departments may provide guidelines for reviewing specific scores and other departments indicate that the decision can be based on the reviewer's judgment, which can be subjective (Wang et al., 2020). Once departments render a decision, the decision and documentation are typically sent back to the graduate admissions office for the official communication of the decision to be sent to the applicant via snail mail or email. If the applicant is accepted, they will have the opportunity to confirm their spot within the program by completing a form. Once they confirm and the registration of classes has opened, the prospective student can begin registering for courses in their chosen program.

Holistic Admissions

Holistic admissions within higher education refers to one way that college and university applications are reviewed for an admissions decision. This type of review of applications uses information contained in an academic context such as transcripts and test scores, but also uses a prospective student's character, community involvement, and background to determine whether students are qualified to be admitted (Bastedo et al., 2018; Talkad et al., 2018). Another way holistic admissions can be defined is that multiple factors are taken into consideration, which

include both academic and nonacademic factors (Coleman & Keith, 2018). Additionally, Coleman and Keith indicated that the holistic admissions process consists of three main characteristics: alignment with the institutional mission, the applicant's ability to succeed along with peer educational enhancement, and the review of multiple factors of an applicant as mentioned in their definition. Using a holistic approach, reviewers often determine an applicant's fit within the institution in hopes of creating a diverse cohort (Hackett & Ruyak, 2022). Using a holistic approach when making college admissions decisions will provide an opportunity for the admissions staff to incorporate the institution's mission of diversity and evaluate the applicant as a whole person (Francis et al., 2021). This means that admissions staff and faculty reviewers will review all aspects of an applicant to include academic, social, background, ethnicity, and even racial factors to determine success within a college program.

Since a holistic approach of reviewing college and university applications is also used to predict student success, one cannot simply admit an applicant based on the student's demonstrated academic ability but rather combine both academic and nonacademic factors (Choi et al., 2018). Furthermore, traditional college and university admission approaches that focus only on academic merit are not a consistent measure of predicting student success or effectiveness (DeCoux Hampton et al., 2022). In the context of implicit bias, although it is important to identify the appropriate metrics and factors to predict student success, individuals making the final admissions decisions also need to take their own biases into account and how their biases may influence their decisions (Zimmnicki et al., 2022). One could also argue that institutions that focus on providing a holistic review of applications would allow admissions staff and faculty reviewers to quickly identify applicants who will be successful, not only in their future careers but also in their college journey in terms of their diverse experiences within the

collegiate atmosphere (Kamis et al., 2022). Because a holistic review of applications can be viewed to increase diversity in a higher education institution (Hampton & Apen, 2022), one could argue that a holistic admission approach is very similar to an AA policy. College admission policies that review both academic metrics and extracurricular activities have historically provided White applicants with an advantage over minority applicants or from a lower economic status (Jayakumar & Page, 2021). Both approaches are used to increase enrollments by looking at factors beyond the academic standpoint and concrete academic data. Many higher education institutions are implementing holistic reviews of applications within their admissions processes, and in turn, many prospective students and their families want to fully understand the factors they are being evaluated upon for decisions (Hossler et al., 2019). Colleges and universities that seek to implement holistic admissions policies and procedures must change the criteria in which applicants are evaluated upon and encourage new, innovative ways to mitigate potential inequalities in the admissions process (Posselt et al., 2023). This will mean that higher education institutions must collaborate with all internal and external stakeholders to review their respective admissions policies with a holistic approach in mind.

Implicit Bias in University Admissions

A quick search of the Internet will reveal opinion pieces on implicit bias within the college admissions process (Lee, 2022; Shambaugh, 2018; The Kira Talent Blog, 2020), but relatively few studies have been conducted to confirm the validity of writers' opinions. Implicit bias within the college admission process typically hinges on the decision-maker's judgment and personal thoughts or attitudes about applicants (Emelianov et al., 2022). The current literature in this area covers a wide array of implicit biases including gender, sexual orientation, weight, and racial bias (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020; Maxfield et al., 2019; Nabil et al.,

2021; Park et al., 2020; Weise et al., 2023). Physical appearance (weight) bias in the admissions process has been found in recent studies of medical school selections (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Maxfield et al., 2019).

Recent studies conducted on letters of recommendation for acceptance into a particular program revealed results that were contradictory. For instance, one study conducted on the wording and language used within letters of recommendation revealed that it is unlikely that gender bias would affect a candidate's likelihood of being accepted into a program (Rice et al., 2021). However, another study conducted on letters of recommendation suggested that letters written about female applicants contained more positive words than those of male applicants, which contained more negative words (Houser & Lemmons, 2017). Similarly, another scholar indicated that no gender bias existed in the wording of a personal statement that would be required for a college admission decision (Niessen & Neumann, 2021). Some research does suggest that gender bias does exist within the college admissions process (Houser & Lemmons, 2017); however, other researchers suggest that gender bias does not exist (Niessen & Neumann, 2021; Rice et al., 2021). Inquisitive individuals who read these research studies may not know which study to lean on for accuracy. One would need to consider the limitations of each study and understand how results could be generalized or applied to other institutions.

The current research on implicit bias within the university admissions process has also been conducted on the admission officers in various universities (Bowman & Bastedo, 2017; Hardy, 2020; Jones et al., 2018). The university admissions process differs from institution to institution. Both undergraduate and graduate admissions officers review applications for completeness before passing them on to department faculty to review or they review the applications based on a preset rubric. If admissions officers are making the acceptance or denial

decisions, their implicit bias could have a significant impact on the decision-making process (Hardy, 2020). Recent studies show that the characteristics of admission officers and their approach to a holistic application review process play an important part in the decision-making process (Bowman & Bastedo, 2017; Jones et al., 2018). Considering the documented cases of bias within the college admissions process, institutions must continue to develop ways in which bias can be eliminated from the selection process as there will always be some form of bias present (Jayakumar & Page, 2021). Many higher education institutions that claim their admissions policies are race-neutral are not technically race-neutral as inherent bias exists (Evans et al., 2022). Additionally, admission committees must assess their own personal biases and the impact that their biases may have on the selection of students and training may aid in mitigating these biases (Zimnicki et al., 2022).

Implicit Bias Training Rationale

As a result of an increasing number of implicit bias cases across the country in recent years, efforts have been made in organizations and institutions to combat individual implicit biases from permeating their respective environments (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020; Kidd et al., 2022; Onyeader et al., 2021). One approach to combat the phenomenon was to bolster the use of implicit bias training sessions across a variety of industries (Kidd et al., 2022). Organizations are utilizing implicit bias training sessions to facilitate more diversity and inclusion in the workplace (Onyeader et al., 2021). Implicit bias training is also known as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and is meant to bring about organizational inclusiveness and diversity, specifically for under-represented minorities (Naidoo et al., 2023). Creating awareness of bias and its effects is of the utmost importance in developing an implicit bias educational workshop (Sabin et al., 2022). It has been suggested that implicit bias training sessions can create awareness of one's

own biases and be the catalyst in bringing about change in an individual's attitude (Pennington et al., 2022). One author noted that individuals may already recognize their own biases and acknowledge that their attitudes must change even though they did not attend a formal implicit bias training course (Maxwell et al., 2020). Even in childhood, implicit bias training can effectively reduce negative thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of others (Qian et al., 2017). In terms of the higher education industry and to improve university campus climates, implicit bias training sessions were developed to identify any unconscious negative thoughts and perceptions of individuals that may influence inappropriate behavior (Applebaum, 2019). Furthermore, higher education institutions have a responsibility and an obligation to ensure an inclusive environment for all individuals (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020).

Identifying and using various strategies to reduce implicit bias should begin with the understanding that the topic is sensitive and applies to all industries across the globe (Teall et al., 2019). It is evident that implicit bias training sessions are needed to equip college admissions faculty and staff with the resources and tools to combat implicit bias within the college admissions process (Pieper & Krsmanovic, 2022). In the higher education sector, implicit bias training sessions should provide faculty and staff with appropriate strategies to reduce negative implicit thoughts, feelings, and attitudes and curricula should be developed for students to aid in understanding how their implicit biases affect others and how to mitigate their biases (Bowen, 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2021).

With every new initiative, there will almost always be some resistance, and not everyone will be on board with the new efforts. Such is the case with implicit bias training sessions. Recent studies indicate that implicit bias training sessions may backfire in terms of the ability to cognitively retrain the brain for bias (Burns et al., 2017). Furthermore, such training sessions

may activate stereotypes instead of decreasing stereotyping behavior (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). It has been suggested that while implicit bias training may educate individuals regarding their biases and the need to mitigate biases, if the implicit bias training is viewed as a corrective response to biases, attendees may be resistant to the information presented in the training (Foley & Williamson, 2018). While scholars have indicated that implicit bias trainings are not needed (Cahn et al., 2021), there is overwhelming evidence that suggests that implicit bias training is crucial to creating awareness of biases and introducing strategies to mitigate biases going forward (Bowen, 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2021; Pieper & Krsmanovic, 2022). These undesired outcomes should be considered when implementing implicit bias training. University administrators should review every angle and anticipated outcomes and then strategize to mitigate undesired outcomes.

Training Formats and Modalities

Implicit bias professional development opportunities can be conducted in various formats such as sessions, workshops, or programs, and can be either face-to-face or online/virtual (Chang et al., 2019; Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017; Trinh et al., 2021). The longevity of the training can play an important role in the effectiveness of the training and how participant attitudes may or may not change afterward (Chang et al., 2018; Trinh et al., 2021). The modality of the training is also important as studies suggest that both physical and online training sessions have positive results (Chang et al., 2019; Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017).

Face-to-face implicit bias training sessions appear to produce the best training outcomes more than online formats (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017); however, online training sessions can also lead to positive outcomes (Chang et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2022; Trinh et al., 2021). Sometimes, current research studies can contradict each other. In recent healthcare-related studies on training

delivery formats, one study indicated that participants did not prefer videos or reading as their training format (Barber Doucet et al., 2021) whereas participants from a different study felt the online implicit bias training program was practical, engaging, and useful (Liu et al., 2022).

Another research study conducted with an online training aspect also revealed that the participants found it useful and insightful (Trinh et al., 2021).

Specific online implicit bias trainings were developed to essentially place all participants on a level playing field as it relates to cultural sensitivity in addition to ensuring that all attendees can participate (Trinh et al., 2021). Online training formats may increase the level of implicit bias awareness outside of the confines of the virtual environment (Hutchins & Goldstein Hode, 2021). Implicit bias training sessions that are short in duration may not be as effective (Chang et al., 2018; Trinh et al., 2021); however, other research contradicts this notion considering a 45-minute online implicit bias intervention training produced positive results (Liu et al., 2022). Higher education administrators or organizational directors could also use the image of implicit bias training sessions as a way for the public to see them in a positive light rather than to increase diversity awareness (Schoen & Rost, 2021).

Training Attendees

In the realm of higher education, attendees of implicit bias professional development sessions are typically faculty, staff, and students. While there may be some implicit bias or diversity training initiatives focused on students in and out of the classroom, many recent studies have focused on 1st-year college professors (Ehrke et al., 2020) or focused on both faculty and staff (Hutchins & Goldstein Hode, 2021). Faculty members are typically the predominant participants in an implicit bias training provided by a college or university (Carnes et al., 2021). Regardless of role, it appears that individuals in an organization or higher education institution

that routinely interacts with others on a daily basis are prime candidates to attend an implicit bias training, which would include staff members employed by a university and can span many departments including housing, food services, parking services, student wellness, and even school administrators such as associate deans and directors of various programs (Corte & Amrein-Beardsley, 2023; Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020). Specific research studies on diversity training have also been conducted in a narrow fashion to explore training effectiveness within the general population of university faculty and staff and in the area of psychology, but the research does not indicate what their roles are within their respective institutions (Hutchins & Goldstein Hode, 2021; Trinh et al, 2021); however, other research has been conducted on undergraduate students in both online and face-to-face formats (Stauss et al., 2018).

Training Session Goals and Objectives

Due to the rise in diversity, higher education institutions and other organizations are integrating diversity concepts through workplace training programs aimed at producing positive outcomes (Brown et al., 2021). One of the basic goals of implicit bias training is to change attitudes of employees and improve certain skills that will modify behaviors (Saira et al., 2020). Although implicit bias training sessions are gaining popularity, there is evidence that these training sessions are inconsistent in reaching the intended goals of increasing bias awareness and diversity (Devine & Ash, 2022; Rawski & Conroy, 2020). Scholars also state that although an implicit bias training can cause some discomfort, attending such a training can facilitate conversations between colleagues and, perhaps, address the challenges of negative mindsets and previously learned attitudes (Moin & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021). Much of the emphasis of diversity training or implicit bias training is not on the content, goals or objectives, or the effectiveness of the training. The intention is to increase the awareness of individual implicit

biases and how their effects can impact others, either positively or negatively. The teaching of implicit bias within these types of trainings focuses on self-awareness of personal biases and monitoring behaviors exhibited so that the implicit attitudes do not become explicit and affect others in an external manner (Kim & Roberson, 2022). What many of the implicit bias training workshops or programs do not focus on are the strategies that should be used in ensuring one's own personal biases are mitigated and not used when working with other individuals. The result of an implicit bias training is to effectively reduce and mitigate implicit bias attitudes, thoughts, and feelings.

While there has been more interest in emotional intelligence assessments in recent years, many organizations and higher education institutions are not focusing on the emotional intelligence aspect in relation to diversity and associated professional development training (Morales Rodríguez et al., 2020). Research suggests that emotional intelligence is crucial in diverse workplaces (Philip et al., 2023). Adding an emotion management component to implicit bias or diversity training opportunities can help attendees identify and control their emotions to create lasting change personally and professionally (Davis et al., 2021). Furthermore, research suggests that administrators should add mindfulness and self-reflection activities to training programs in relation to diversity or cultural sensitivity (Azevedo & Shane, 2019).

Additionally, specific training goals or program goals should be articulated in the training design (Davey et al., 2021). Training programs that provide specific objectives or goals that reduce negative biases may aid in policy changes depending upon the success or failure of the training (Quinn, 2020). Certain external predictors, such as organizational identification, may affect training outcomes. In other words, employees who feel a sense of connectedness to an organization or an institution may contribute to the positive outcomes of a training and may also

be more satisfied with their job (Na-Nan et al., 2018; Rawski & Conroy, 2020). One important outcome of an implicit bias training or diversity training is affective commitment, which essentially means that the training may increase an employees' sense of belonging to an organization. Affective commitment is also rising as an early predictor of job satisfaction (Saira et al., 2020). Since training programs for diversity are meant to increase awareness of religious, cultural, and racial differences among people, effective training programs are those where individuals embrace individual differences and ultimately make them more committed to the organization or higher education institution (Saira et al., 2020).

Post-Training Evaluation

Effective evaluations of implicit bias training programs play a critical role in decision-making and drastically affect the improvement of future training (Rohmann et al., 2017). While unconscious bias training is gaining traction with employers, many trainings have not been evaluated nor have effective interventions been created within organizations (McCormick-Huhn et al., 2020). Many implicit bias trainings are evaluated by the trainers with no professional training course (Froncek et al., 2018). Moreover, feedback from evaluations may provide the trainer with evidence of the need to improve upon their trainer competencies (Froncek et al., 2018; Rohmann et al., 2017). In some instances, organizations may choose to create a training program for individuals designed to coach potential trainers on how to conduct a successful implicit bias training session (Cheng et al., 2023). Because training evaluations are conducted across multiple disciplines, understanding specific competencies will aid in the development of future evaluation practices (Froncek et al, 2018). Ogunyemi (2021) supported the notion that trainers/facilitators need professional evaluation training, and the lack of evaluator training may impede training implementation. Recent research also indicates that educational administrators

should seek to prioritize implicit bias trainings and allow for adequate time to complete the training, but not so much that the training is too time-consuming (Ogunyemi, 2021).

Furthermore, Fix (2020) alluded to the fact that one single training will not garner overnight, lasting change; however, subsequent trainings may be the catalyst to ensuring that the goals of implicit bias are on-going.

Training Effectiveness

Higher education institutions that conduct diversity initiatives, training sessions, or programs should seek to assess the effect that their respective programs have on their ability to enhance the university's campus climate (Warren et al., 2021). To evaluate the effectiveness of any training program, participants must attend the training, whether virtual or physical (Carnes et al., 2021). If educational administrators would like for implicit bias training sessions to be effective, more effort and emphasis should be placed on the amount of participant engagement during the training (Carnes et al., 2021).

Implicit bias trainings are, oftentimes, mandated by accrediting bodies, especially in healthcare education (Gill et al., 2022). An implicit bias training's effectiveness could also be hampered or decreased if the training is mandatory for faculty and staff. Research shows that mandatory training for seasoned employees may face resistance; therefore, decreasing the chances that the training will be absorbed by the attendees (Lehman et al., 2022). Moreover, repeated training sessions with the same information will also decrease the number of participants and will prevent necessary changes in attitudes (Lehman et al., 2022). Although online training was developed, in part, for individuals who did not have much time set aside for professional development, little is known about the effectiveness of training sessions in an online environment (Goldstein Hode et al., 2018). It has been suggested that although the effects of an

implicit bias training session may appear to be positive at first, as time goes on, the effects of the training may decrease (Naidoo et al., 2023).

Relatively few studies, both quantitative and qualitative, have investigated the effectiveness of diversity policies in organizations (Schoen & Rost, 2021). Furthermore, while research has been conducted on the effectiveness of online implicit bias training (Goldstein Hode et al., 2018), little research has been conducted to compare the effectiveness of face-to-face training formats and online formats (Stauss et al., 2018). Additionally, research on the effectiveness of implicit bias training in real-world settings is hard to find and training sessions should include multiple approaches that would be beneficial to the training (Ehrke et al., 2020). For future research studies, the current research suggests that each component of the training should mirror the specific training objectives or goals to accurately evaluate the training's effectiveness (Stauss et al., 2018). Other scholars note that valuable lessons provided within the training should reflect organization initiatives and strategic planning and be a part of an employee's performance evaluation (Lai & Lisnek, 2023).

Attendee Experiences

Research studies on the lived experiences of faculty and staff in the realm of implicit bias are few and far in between. How do attendees feel about the implicit bias training once it is over? What kind of experiences do they have? Are their experiences positive or negative? In the current research, only a handful of "lived experiences" have been found, but they differ in terms of what lived experiences are referenced (Javier et al., 2022; Lincoln & Stanley, 2021; Okorie-Awé et al., 2021). Out of three studies about experiences, one study referenced the lived experiences of faculty, staff, and students in terms of an actual implicit bias workshop (Okorie-Awé et al., 2021) while the other two studies referenced the lived experiences of actual implicit

bias in real-world situations (Javier et al., 2022; Lincoln & Stanley, 2021). For most of the research studies conducted on implicit bias training sessions, workshops, or programs, the researchers do not provide details on the areas of higher education in which the attendees work. Understanding the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of those who work in specific university departments may lend some insight into how their “changed” behavior or thought processes may impact their daily work and their daily interactions.

Summary

The term *implicit bias* represents the invisible thoughts and perceptions that individuals may possess regarding certain groups of people or situations and may cover a wide array of aspects including race, gender, weight, age, and sexual orientation. Using Ajzen’s (1991) and Bandura’s (1971) theories, conclusions from the study may confirm that participants’ behaviors could have been predicted ahead of time due to the presence of implicit bias or lack of bias and directly relate to prior social interactions of participants. Implicit biases can permeate nearly every aspect of higher education including the students, the faculty, employment, and the admissions process. Implicit bias training programs were created to increase bias awareness in numerous areas with the hopes of promoting diversity. Implicit bias training attendees include faculty, staff, and students, and attendees can participate online or face-to-face. Research has shown a discrepancy in the effectiveness of implicit bias training sessions and suggests that involuntary participation may impede the overall goals of implicit bias training sessions.

Few studies focus on university admission staff and faculty reviewers and do not portray the thoughts and feelings of participants within the admissions realm or how their experiences with implicit bias training sessions may provide solutions to mitigate implicit bias within the university admissions process. Additionally, there is scarce research in this area within the

general population of an educational administration setting or within the public higher education sector. The problem is that there is a gap within the current research that does not address the implicit bias training experiences, thoughts, feelings, or perceptions of university admissions staff or faculty reviewers. Moreover, the current research does not indicate how their experiences with the training sessions have equipped them with real world solutions and strategies to eradicate, or at the very least, mitigate implicit bias within the university admissions process.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session while working at a higher education institution. Understanding faculty and staff thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of implicit bias training programs may help to drive change and improve admissions processes while mitigating perceived biases. At this stage in the research, implicit bias training sessions are generally defined as professional development opportunities meant to create awareness of implicit bias and be a catalyst for changing attitudes and/or university policies. The following sections and subsections address the major components of the research plan, which include the research design, research questions, settings and participants, researcher positionality, procedures, data collection plan, trustworthiness, and summary.

Research Design

I, as the researcher, studied the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who attended a university implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session while working at a higher education institution. A qualitative research design was appropriate for my study based on Creswell and Poth's (2018) description of characteristics that make up a qualitative design, which include the setting in which participants experienced the issue being studied, the researcher as the instrument of data collection, the utilization of multiple methods of data collection, and participant perspectives. Participants were able to convey their perspectives and lived experiences surrounding the issue through multiple methods that I provided to them.

For my study, I chose to use a phenomenological approach because I attempted to understand the participant's lived experiences and perspectives from any university implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions they previously attended. Largely developed by Edmund Husserl, a phenomenological study refers to a study that is conducted on a specific phenomenon as described by those immersed into such phenomenon based on their personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas also noted that a phenomenological approach to a research study starts with understanding one's own perceptions before attempting to understand perceptions from others. My study specifically explored the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, perspectives, and lived experiences of the participants.

Based on the subjectivity of the phenomenon studied, I conducted my study using a transcendental phenomenological approach. The transcendental aspect refers to the meaning of the Greek word *epoche*, which means that everyday perceptions, attitudes, and judgments should be set aside (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas posited that both the researcher's and participant's own bias should be bracketed and put to the side to see the phenomenon as it is for a fresh and open state of mind. Conducting a transcendental phenomenological study on the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have previously attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session provided different types of information for the study. First, the research design provided an in-depth look into their personal experiences. Second, their experiences provided specific data on how these types of training sessions could be improved for their respective roles. Lastly, insights and new perspectives that surfaced provided practical solutions and strategies to either mitigate or eliminate potential biases within the university admissions process.

Research Questions

The research questions of a study play an integral part of the process because the answers that appear within the data collection methods will ultimately shape the outcome and conclusions drawn from the study. They are used to essentially guide the data collection methods and provide a compass to navigate the complexity of the proposed study. The results, findings, and conclusions regarding the research questions are addressed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Central Research Question

What are the perspectives and lived experiences of admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training while working at a higher education institution?

Sub-Question One

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive their social interactions and upbringing to influence their experiences during and after the implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions?

Sub-Question Two

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive their experiences of implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions should drive policy changes within university admissions processes?

Sub-Question Three

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions have impacted their mindsets or behaviors regarding their roles in the college admissions process?

Setting and Participants

The purpose of this section is to provide insight on two important aspects of the research study. The first section provides a thorough overview of the research setting. The second section provides an understanding of the individuals that participated in the research study. This section details a profile of the participants and provides a rationale behind why they were chosen to participate and criteria that was used to choose them.

Setting

Because the research study sought to understand the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session, workshop, or program within the last 5 years (in-person or online) while working at a higher education institution, a specific site was not chosen and was open for those who met the criteria as described above. The rationale behind the chosen setting was to garner responses from individuals who met the study criteria and to represent a wide range of colleges and universities.

Participants

The participants of this study were full-time and part-time faculty and staff members who work or have worked within the admissions department, faculty who review applications (or have reviewed applications) for admissions decisions, and attended one or more implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions within the last 5 years (in-person or online). There were no restrictions for race, gender, ethnicity, age, or time in their respective positions. The rationale behind not restricting the above items for faculty or staff members was to obtain data from all individuals, regardless of demographics, which provided insights into their thoughts, perceptions, opinions, and feelings surrounding the implicit bias training. A well-

rounded participant pool of 11 individuals ensured the most diverse perspectives across all demographics as most institutions and organizations employ a diverse population of faculty and staff.

Recruitment Plan

Developing a solid recruitment plan ensured participation from the participant pool to achieve results from each data collection method. I used the purposeful sampling approach based on the roles needed to purposefully inform the study and the phenomenon in which the study is based upon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purposeful sampling method was appropriate because the phenomenon specifically surrounded implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions for those that have been directly involved in the university admissions process. I chose this sample of participants as a direct result of the phenomenon that was studied. My goal was to obtain at least the required minimum number of participants (10) or until saturation was reached. In addition, the number of participants chosen was needed just in case a participant decided to withdraw from the research study. A consent form was sent as an attachment if a respondent met the participant criteria.

After obtaining Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the next step was to solicit participants. Following Liberty University's IRB guidelines, I used multiple recruitment methods including a recruitment flyer that was distributed to social media sites as well as a recruitment email distributed to individuals who were identified as meeting the participant criteria. The recruitment flyer contained a brief overview of the study, participant criteria, data collection methods used, a statement regarding an incentive to participate, and a link to a Google Form recruitment survey. The distribution of the recruitment email was sent from both my current university work email address and my Liberty University email address.

The recruitment email provided them with details of the research study including the purpose of the study and any items that required their participation. A disclaimer was included that stated if they were chosen to participate, I would reach out to them. In addition, the recruitment email contained an attachment for a survey for soliciting research study participation. Combining the survey and the consent form in the recruitment email ensured efficiency and reduced the need for multiple correspondence. Participants were asked to save a copy of the consent form to their computer, type their name and date on the form, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment before the study procedures began. This provided me with a general number of participants. The consent form also included a statement informing each participant that if they consented to participate in the study, they also consented to the interview being recorded.

Considering that the topic of implicit/unconscious bias can be upsetting to some, participants may have felt uneasy and uncomfortable discussing the topic in detail. The consent form included a section informing them of the sensitivity of the topic. Because I did not obtain enough participants in the first round of solicitation, I sent a follow up email and asked those who had responded if they could share the study with colleagues who might qualify to participate. To encourage faculty and staff to participate, I offered them a \$50 electronic gift card to Amazon at the end of the data collection process.

Researcher's Positionality

This section explains my motivations for conducting a phenomenological study on the experiences of admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit/unconscious bias or diversity professional development course. I will detail the research paradigm on which I based my research study. Lastly, this section provides information on the three philosophical

assumptions surrounding my research: ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Interpretive Framework

For my research study, I used the pragmatic research paradigm, which was evident throughout the entire study. Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) noted that there are three principles of a pragmatic approach: actionable knowledge, acknowledging the connection between knowing and acting, and “inquiry as an experiential process” (p. 3). By taking a pragmatic approach to conducting my transcendental phenomenological study, I was able to ensure that my findings and ultimate conclusions could be used for practical application. For example, the findings and conclusions from my research study may assist other college and university admissions personnel in determining if such a training is warranted on their respective campuses and how their trainings may help in mitigating potential biases within their admissions processes.

Philosophical Assumptions

As a researcher, it is important to establish a research philosophy to share with readers as doing so will help them understand the researcher’s background and why he or she believes what they believe. Personally, my beliefs and values permeate every aspect of my life. This was also true when I conducted my research study. In my research study, my philosophical assumptions were evident in each aspect; however, my focus was purely on the participants and their experiences. The following subsections describe each philosophical assumption as it relates to my completed research study.

Ontological Assumption

Because I am a child of God, I firmly believe there is one reality – the reality of God’s word. Although my values and belief system centers around the word of God and His principles, I fully understand and acknowledge that everyone I encounter will not feel or think in the same

manner as I. With this understanding, I realized that the experiences, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of my research participants were vastly different from my own. Due to the subjectivity of my research topic and study in general, I ignored my own beliefs and values to stay true to participant information, which was difficult at times, but had to be done so as to not jeopardize or damage the credibility of the study. I acknowledged and respected that the participants had different beliefs from mine and did not let my beliefs impact the study in any shape.

Epistemological Assumption

Because I was ultimately seen as the expert on my topic of implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training sessions and each aspect that is involved, my knowledge of the information was significantly more than that of the participants in my study. Some of the participants knew what implicit bias was and have been a part of a training session at a previous organization. My knowledge on the subject was not part of the study's findings and conclusions since I was investigating each participant's experiences and knowledge. The relationship that I have with the topic was null and void because I did not interject my thoughts, feelings, and perceptions into data analysis. The participants who were well-versed on the subject were able to offer more information during the data collection portion of the study than those who were relatively new to the subject and concept of implicit bias training sessions.

Axiological Assumption

For my research study, the participants were not knowledgeable of my personal beliefs and values as knowing them could have swayed or influenced their answers in the data collection portion. After the interview portion, I informed the participants that I have attended an implicit/unconscious bias training session at a previous university; however, I did not inform

them of my personal experiences. Informing them ahead of time may have made the “power of suggestion” much more significant and influenced the outcomes of the study. By understanding that I had been involved in an implicit bias training session previously, the participants and I were instantly connected to the research itself. After the research study was conducted, the data analyzed and synthesized, and the dissertation complete, I communicated my personal experiences of my previous training session as well as my personal experience of the research study to the participants. Keeping my biases out of the entire research process ensured that participants and their information were the only items analyzed and shared for the study.

Researcher’s Role

My role in the research study as the human instrument only means that I conducted the transcendental phenomenology study to determine the outcomes and answer the research questions based on the findings from data collection and analysis. While I did know some of the participants personally, my relationship with them had no influence over their participation or statements. I had no authority over anyone and did not influence participation, thoughts, feelings, or perceptions of the implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training sessions. Although I have been employed in the higher education industry for nearly two decades in various capacities, my experiences, biases, thoughts, and feelings did not interfere with data collection, analysis, or the research study in general.

Procedures

This section outlines the steps and procedures that I used to ensure that the study could be replicated if another researcher wanted to research the same topic and idea. This section also details Liberty University’s IRB approval, solicitation of the participants, data collection methods and analysis procedures, and an explanation of how the study ensured each method

complemented the others.

Data Collection Plan

In a qualitative phenomenological research study, it is best to develop and implement several methods of data collection to obtain as much relevant participant data to assist in answering the research study's major questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since I sought to understand the experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who attended an implicit/unconscious bias, or diversity training session (in-person or online), I developed a few ways to gather the necessary data. I used the information gleaned from a questionnaire via a Google form, documents from actual training sessions, and individual interviews with participants. From these data collection methods, I analyzed the data to answer the research questions. First, I gathered their initial feelings about attending such a training as well as gauged their level of understanding on the topic of implicit bias via a questionnaire. Second, I interviewed the participants for more in-depth perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and opinions about their training sessions, which was conducted virtually using the Microsoft Teams video-conferencing platform. Lastly, I used the documentation obtained from their respective training sessions, workshops, or programs to determine the exact components of the training and if the training focused on any issue surrounding the university admissions process with suggested strategies to mitigate implicit bias.

Questionnaire Data

I sent a questionnaire in a Google Form format to the participants prior to individual interviews. The questionnaire contained some questions on the topic of implicit bias, their feelings towards a training session such as this one on university campuses, and how one may feel after attending the training has been completed. The questionnaire provided some

background on their level of understanding on the topic of implicit bias, prepared them for the interview on their specific experience with the implicit bias training by jogging their memory, and how they believed a person's thoughts and perceptions might change after attending a training of this nature. The data obtained by using this method assisted in identifying any preconceived notions on the topic that may have skewed their perceptions in subsequent data collection methods.

Table 1

Questionnaire

1. Describe your own definition of implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity.
2. How do you feel about colleges and universities implementing implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions?
3. In what ways may an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training change the thoughts, feelings, or perceptions of an individual?

Documents

The next data collection method that I used was to obtain any documents that were provided in each implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session (whether in-person or online). I asked each participant to email any documents, handouts, or PowerPoint slide decks they possessed in connection with the training they attended to my Liberty University email address prior to their respective interviews. The documents obtained included any handouts from the face-to-face session, presentation slides, printouts from online sessions, and specific goals and objectives identified. Considering that some of the interview questions involved the information presented being related back to roles of attendees, the specific goals, and objectives that college administrators or the expert presenter developed may confirm or deny a relation. The

documents were used to compare the information contained within them to the information obtained in questionnaires and individual interviews. This enabled me to identify common themes from other data collection methods to the information in the documents.

Individual Interviews

The final data collection method was individual interviews conducted with recruited participants that have attended an implicit/unconscious bias, or diversity training within the last five years and provided personal insight into the training session and their experience. An interview allowed the participants to verbally communicate their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and opinions regarding the training sessions. After I obtained the information from the recruitment survey, consent form, and questionnaire, I contacted each participant for the interview data collection portion. Each participant and I identified a day/time for the interview to be conducted and allowed approximately one hour for the interview. Each interview was conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams to protect each participant and their information. I informed each participant that the interviews were being recorded and the transcript would be sent to them via email to ensure the accuracy of their words and statements.

Table 2

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position.
2. Please provide a detailed overview of your position (or past position) with the college admissions office.
3. Describe your thoughts about implicit bias (if known) prior to attending the training.
4. Please explain the mode of delivery for the implicit bias training (face-to-face or online)?
5. How did the mode of delivery make you feel?

6. While in the training, what kinds of thoughts were you thinking regarding the information about implicit bias?
7. In your opinion, how would you describe the alignment of the topic and information presented with the responsibilities of your role?
8. How did the implicit bias training session change your mindset or attitude towards others?
9. Describe any factors or aspects of the training session that contributed to a mindset or attitude change.
10. If the training did not change your mindset, why not?
11. Please describe how the implicit bias training session may help you in your current position or in possible future positions.
12. Overall, describe your experience with attending an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session.
13. Please describe any implicit bias that you have observed within the college admissions process. Would you please provide some examples?
14. Please describe a time when you observed a colleague verbalize bias when discussing an applicant.
 - a. How did that make you feel?
 - b. How did you initially respond and knowing what you know now, would you have responded differently? How so?
15. In your opinion, describe how your experiences with implicit bias training could help develop real solutions to mitigate implicit bias within the college admissions process.

16. If an opportunity to attend another implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training arose, would you attend? Why or why not?

17. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with implicit bias training that we have not discussed?

The research questions connected directly to the central research questions and sub-questions in that they (questions) probed into the minds of the participants. The questions were developed due to the subjective nature of the study and focused solely on the participants' own judgments and perspectives. Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 12, and 17 directly focused on the central research question and surrounded the participants' thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and lived experiences with implicit bias, their respective roles within the college admissions process, and implicit bias training sessions. Questions 3, 8, 13, and 14 focused on answering the first sub-question and provided insight into each participant's social interactions and upbringing. Questions 7, 11, 15, and 16 surrounded the second sub-question and provided information for future directions in their respective roles. The third sub-question was answered using information from Questions 9 and 10 and provided information on participant behaviors and mindsets. From the theoretical standpoint, Questions 8, 9, 10, 13, and 14 gave credence to Bandura's (1971) social learning theory and Ajzen's (1991) TPB based on participant answers that were given. As the researcher, I ensured these questions were appropriate to ask in an individual interview and each question was reviewed by experts within the higher education field.

Data Analysis

To compile the information contained within the questionnaires for each participant, I exported the questionnaire results from the Google Form to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Meyer and Avery (2008) noted that although Excel is mainly associated with *quantitative* data

analysis, it can be a useful tool for qualitative data analysis because it allows for a large amount of data and can be displayed in a variety of ways. To help locate apparent themes or categories within the responses, I changed the format of the Microsoft Excel to a Microsoft Word document and uploaded the document to a software program called Atlas.ti that assisted with identifying themes and categories. Atlas.ti is a software program that is used to house various types of data and can be used for coding and identifying themes across various data sources. The software is helpful in that it enables the researcher to track items such as key words, terms, and other journal sources along with the ability to add documents for further inspection (Smit & Scherman, 2021).

The next data source that was analyzed was any documents collected before, during, and after implicit/unconscious bias, or diversity training session (face-to-face or online). As detailed in the data collection section, the documents included a list of training goals and objectives, illustrations, and presentation slides and any other documentation provided during training sessions. These documents were also uploaded into the Atlas.ti software program and assisted in locating and identifying keywords, common themes, and categories across all participants and their experiences. The list of training goals and objectives were cross-referenced with other documents, participant questionnaires, and transcripts to assist in answering a portion of the central research question.

For analyzing the participant interviews for my research study, I utilized the live transcription feature that Microsoft Teams has available for users. It was best to use transcription software that captured all spoken words and turned them into a text form for analysis. Transcripts of verbal interviews allowed me to peruse their data quickly rather than rewind and play each participant video over and over and was used to search for keywords or phrases (Jenkins et al., 2021). I watched the video interviews and read the transcribed interview documents multiple

times to ensure that I fully understood the information and to ensure data accuracy. As the interviews are transcribed, I emailed each participant their transcribed interview so they can ensure the accuracy and validity of their interview. I uploaded the transcripts into the Atlas.ti software to identify common themes and categories found throughout each interview. I utilized the method Richard Rogers (2018) suggested, which is the use of first and second cycle coding methods for interviews and transcripts. The first cycle coding methods consist of seven subcategories and each subcategory has specific coding types, one of which is called *in vivo* or literal coding, which uses the interviewees own words to detect specific codes. Second cycle coding can be used to either reanalyze or reorganize codes from the first cycle coding process (Rogers, 2018).

Once all data was thoroughly analyzed and common themes and categories identified, the task of synthesizing everything into a logical body of work began. I used the conventional content analysis method for synthesizing the data after plugging each collection method into their respective data management tools (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). My data synthesis plans included locating the common themes and categories identified in each data collection method and attributing them to a specific research question since answering the research questions was part of the purpose of the study. The themes and common experiences that surfaced during the analysis phase provided me with the necessary information to interpret the findings in a way that connected to the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness for any research study is crucial and gives credence to the findings, results, and implications. Readers must be able to trust the researcher, the process, and the study itself as it (the study) may influence their decision about a particular issue or situation. To ensure

that my study had the trustworthiness factor, there were things that must be in place and taken into consideration. In this section, I will discuss several concepts and what I did to ensure the trustworthiness of my study. These concepts include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I will also discuss ethical considerations as they relate to the participants and the study itself.

Credibility

Establishing and maintaining credibility in research studies is fundamental to the principles of academic research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If a researcher is found not to be credible, their efforts, research studies, and reputation will be destroyed. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure the credibility of the research itself, the participants, and the findings. One of the ways that I can help to ensure the credibility of my study was to have multiple data collection sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Having more than one data collection method can either confirm or deny individual responses. Another way that I established credibility in my research was to ensure that participants were actively engaged in the study. In my phenomenological study, participants were expected to remember items from the training session in which they attended to participate in the data collection process. Because my study was based on the participants' answers to questions and their experiences of the training sessions, their engagement level was of the utmost importance as their information was the foundation of the findings. I, as the researcher, also remained engaged during the entire research study process. My passion and excitement about the study and the findings that it produced was exhibited throughout the entire study.

Transferability

As the researcher, I was tasked with creating conditions in which my research study findings and conclusions could be applied to other studies and in other areas. Rich descriptions were used in describing the findings of the study to determine if the findings could be applied to other contexts or even in the same context. I acknowledge that even though I could create the conditions of transferability, I cannot assure transferability can be achieved. Even though my research study investigated a specific topic with specific research questions, the data collection methods and data analysis methods that were used can also be used in other qualitative studies. For example, if another researcher wanted to conduct a phenomenological study surrounding the experiences of those involved in a pilot program on a college campus, the researcher would be able to use similar research questions, all data collection methods used for this proposed study, and the same coding techniques. While the results and findings may be different due to a different topic, the way the study is conducted would be the same. Additionally, if a researcher wanted to replicate this exact study, to either confirm or refute the results and findings, the research questions, data collection, and data analysis methods could be used to do so.

Dependability

When I developed my data collection methods along with the data analysis procedures, I ensured that I was thorough in my descriptions of each section. To confirm the dependability of my research study, an extensive audit of the research process can be conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If my methods are not seen as dependable from a reader or academic researcher perspective, the credibility of the study could be in jeopardy. My study was conducted using reliable and dependable methods that have been used in countless other qualitative research studies. My study did not contain any unorthodox research methods, data collection methods, or

any analysis/coding methods that could be seen as questionable or ones that have never been introduced and used previously. The only methods that were used in my study were those that have shown to be effective, reliable, dependable, and relevant. Another researcher should be able to replicate my study using the same research design and methods and conduct the study successfully. Depending upon the participants and their information, the findings from replicated studies could be very different; however, the studies should accomplish the same end goal, which would be to answer the research questions.

Confirmability

It was my duty to ensure that my research study contained only the information from the participants and their experiences. Any bias that I had about the research topic was explicitly addressed and left completely out of the process (Moustakas, 1994). My bias could have jeopardized the entire study, the participants, and the study's credibility. The irony of my research study and this component was that my study was related to bias, specifically implicit bias. My credibility as a researcher could have been potentially damaged if my bias was found within a research study about bias. One of the ways that I ensured confirmability in my research study was by using the reflexivity concept during the process. As defined by Berger (2013), reflexivity is where you turn the topic back on yourself, recognize your own personal biases and feelings about the topic and how they may impact the participants and the findings. In my study, I informed participants prior to conducting the interview that I have attended an implicit bias training session at another university, reassured them any biases that I had were taken out of the research study, and I would be completely focused on them and their personal experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are so crucial in any research study. A research study will not be successful unless all ethical considerations are thoroughly vetted and carried out. Participants have the right to know how researchers plan to obtain the necessary permissions and how the researcher will keep information confidential.

Permissions

Because of the recruitment methods I chose, no permissions were needed from institutions. I completed the IRB process through Liberty University along with two modifications, which were approved. After obtaining approval, I was able to execute my recruitment plan to recruit participants for my study. See Appendix A for IRB approval.

Other Participant Protections

Once I was approved by Liberty University's IRB, I started the recruitment of participants by using a recruitment survey to faculty and staff and a recruitment flyer, which contained a link to the recruitment survey. The consent form used was directly from Liberty University's documents and detailed what each participant consented to (i.e., questionnaire, interview, document analysis). The consent form also informed participants that participation is voluntary, and they were free to discontinue the study at any time for any reason. Participants were provided with information detailing the confidentiality of their information and actual participation. They were informed that their real names would not be used in any documentation or notes and a pseudonym would be used instead. For any data collected, the documents, videos, and other items were housed on an external hard drive, which was password-protected and stayed in a locked office. See Appendix B for the participant consent form.

The risks in participating in the research study were minimal; however, exposing participants to the concepts of implicit bias may have induced feelings that took the participant by surprise. Feelings that a participant may have experienced include anxiety, discomfort, stress-related, guilt, or an increased awareness of their own implicit biases (Manen, 2016). To potentially mitigate the negative feelings that arose during data collection, participants were informed of the emotionally charged and sensitive nature of the study's topic. This information was included in the recruitment portion of the process.

Summary

Conducting a transcendental phenomenological study helped in investigating the lived experiences of admissions staff and faculty reviewers who attended an implicit/unconscious bias, or diversity training session, workshop, or program within the last 5 years. The data collection methods that were chosen (questionnaire, individual interviews, and document analysis) provided a plethora of information that could be used to answer the central research question and sub-questions. The data analysis methods chosen were able to accurately and thoroughly analyze each data collection point to describe themes and categories that were used in a cohesive synthesis of the information. The findings and conclusions from the data collection and data analysis methods provided an understanding of participant experiences with implicit bias professional development training courses and how their experiences could assist in mitigating implicit bias within the college admissions process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences of individuals who work or have worked within college admissions and have attended an implicit/unconscious bias or diversity training. This chapter details the results of data analysis to be presented as findings. This chapter also includes participant profiles, the compiled and analyzed data, which is presented with participant quotes and tables along with themes. The chapter also includes outlier data found and responses to the research questions followed by the conclusion.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited using the purposeful sampling approach based on the roles needed to purposefully inform the study and the phenomenon in which the study is based on (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were recruited through direct email, word of mouth, and by social media. Each participant currently works or has worked at a higher education institution either within the admissions office or as a faculty member who reviews (or has reviewed) applications for admissions decisions. Participant employment aspects included different types of institutions, different student enrollment counts, and different regions within the United States. Participants in this study attended one or more bias and/or diversity trainings either in-person, online, or both. All participants possess a graduate-level degree, and most participants are still employed in the higher education industry. A total of 11 people participated in this research study.

Aiden

Aiden is a White male who works at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States. He began his career in higher education as a tour guide for the

college admissions office while he was earning his undergraduate degree. After 3–4 years, he obtained a full-time job in the admissions office as an admissions officer. He stayed in the role for approximately three years while simultaneously completing his master’s degree. Upon obtaining his graduate degree, he was offered a promotion as an assistant director within the admissions office. In that role, Aiden was responsible for reviewing applications, recruiting students in his territory, and conducting presentations for prospective students. After a couple of years, he was promoted to a senior assistant director role and held the position for a total of 5 years. Most recently, he was offered an associate director role in the career services department. As of last year, Aiden graduated with his doctorate degree and the focus of his research was on the college selection process.

Since working in the higher education industry, Aiden has worked with many current and prospective students who come from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, races, and geographic locations. He understands the importance of treating prospective students with dignity and respect, regardless of their background. In the last several years, Aiden attended three different required bias and diversity training classes as a university employee. Staff were required to complete nine hours of diversity training classes that were approximately three hours long. When asked about the required training classes, Aiden said, “For us in admissions, we had to attend three different trainings and there was really no rhyme or reason as to which one to attend. There was just a list and you chose whatever you wanted to do.”

Beth

Beth is a White female who works at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States and has worked in the higher education industry for approximately 28 years. Beth earned a bachelor’s degree in English and a master’s degree in education. Before

working in higher education, Beth had an interesting career in the entertainment business, but later moved into the higher education industry when she was in her mid-20s. Her college admissions career started as an admissions counselor where she worked her way up to an assistant director position and then into admission operations, marketing, and technology. Beth climbed her way up the proverbial corporate ladder to become the director of admissions, and currently, she is the assistant vice president of enrollment. In this position, she oversees all admissions operations, undergraduate and graduate enrollment, and domestic and international students.

Over the last several years, Beth has attended more than two bias and diversity trainings through different organizations and committees, most of which were online due to the COVID era. About knowing what implicit bias was before any training, Beth stated, “I knew about preconceived stereotypes, but it was something that I only started hearing within the last 5 years as a term.”

Cassandra

Cassandra is a White female who previously worked at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States. She holds a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in psychology. Cassandra’s university admissions work experience began in 2017 where she worked as a graduate assistant within the university’s graduate school. After she graduated with her master’s degree, she was offered a role as an admissions coordinator in the graduate school’s office. Cassandra’s responsibilities as an admissions coordinator were to process applications, gather required admission documents from applicants, communicate with prospective students via email, phone, or in person, and communicate with all departments across campus. Within a year, she was promoted to a senior admissions coordinator position and held the position for

another 2–3 years. Cassandra decided to pursue other career interests and currently works as a data analyst for another company.

While working for the university, Cassandra completed a cultural competency certificate program, which was conducted through a series of in-person sessions. When asked about her thoughts on implicit bias before completing the program, she stated,

I guess that everybody has them (biases) and even though everybody has them, most people don't want to admit they have them. It's just an interesting part of the psychology of the human mind that I was interested in before that.

Deidra

Deidra is a White female who previously worked in the admissions office at a public higher education institution in the northeastern United States. She holds a master's degree in higher education administration and recently graduated with her doctorate, which is also in higher education administration. Deidra's primary responsibilities while in the admissions office was to review applications for prospective students. She currently works in the student success office at the institution.

While working at the institution, Deidra attended two bias and diversity training sessions. One session was conducted online when she was working in the admissions office and the other session was conducted in person within her current department. When asked about her thoughts of implicit bias before attending any training sessions, Deidra responded, "I already knew what it was due to my upbringing. I watched my relatives go through situations in which they were stereotyped and people were biased against them." Some of Deidra's family members are of Native-American descent and were subjected to bias during her childhood and teen years. For

Deidra, the face-to-face training session was insightful. She stated, “It helped me learn more about others who were different from me.”

Eve

Eve is a Native-American female who works at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States. She holds a bachelor’s degree in communication and a master’s degree in higher education. Eve has held a variety of different college admissions roles and has worked for several institutions in the past. During her professional journey, she took a 1-year hiatus from college admissions and went to work for a corporate recruiting firm, but decided it was not the right position for her. She decided to go back to higher education. Eve is currently the assistant director of admissions for the undergraduate population. Her role includes reading prospective student applications and traveling to local high schools to recruit prospective students.

Eve has attended multiple bias and diversity trainings, mostly online as they were completed during the Covid era. The most recent bias training she completed was in November of 2023, which was in person. When asked how she felt about the content presented in the trainings she has attended, she stated, “I, along with other people in my office, have found it frustrating that they are not deep-diving into anything. It’s a broad overview and never really goes beyond that.”

Heather

Heather is a White female who works at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States. She holds a bachelor’s degree in English and a master’s degree in education. Heather’s higher education career started as soon as she graduated from high school. When she was in her undergraduate program, she worked as a resident assistant and orientation

leader. She also worked within the Dean's office for a short period as an office assistant. She decided to pursue another job outside of higher education for a couple of years before returning to the higher education industry. While she was in her master's program, Heather was offered a role as an admissions coordinator within the graduate school department. As an admissions coordinator, Heather was responsible for many things. Her duties included processing applications, ensuring information was entered into the system correctly, and handling all of the admission-related documents that applicants submitted with their graduate application. She also corresponded with prospective students via email, phone, and in person on a daily basis as well as communicated with faculty and staff across campus. She stayed in the position for about two years before landing a job in a different department.

During Heather's time within the graduate school, she completed one bias training, which was conducted online. The training was offered through a learning platform utilized by the institution. When asked about her thoughts while she was completing the training, Heather explained,

For me, because I was already familiar with the concept of implicit bias, I was just clicking through because I already knew the stuff they were talking about. I didn't need to pay especially close attention to certain aspects of it. I also didn't feel it was especially relevant to the job position.

Jay

Jay is a Black male who works as a faculty member in the art department at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States. He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in education. Jay's role as a faculty member includes reviewing prospective student applications and rendering admissions decisions for his program.

Jay explained his process as “a list of prospective students is forwarded to my office. I go to the list, screen each applicant, and then I make the final decision on the students.”

Jay attended an implicit bias training online in June of 2022. When asked about his experience with the training, Jay stated,

I felt very positive at the end of the training because I got to know a lot of things that I wasn't very aware of prior to attending. Because of the training, I now remove any sort of bias whenever it comes to doing my job. I look at things with concrete facts.

Kody

Kody is a Black male who works at a public higher education institution in the midwestern United States. He holds an undergraduate degree in librarianship and a master's degree in education. His educational background was how he was able to start working as an admissions officer at his institution. Kody's responsibilities included reviewing the data and rendering final decisions on prospective student applications. He described his review process as, “Process procedures must be followed. I have to look into the data and determine whether the student should be admitted.” While Kody did not specify how long he worked as an admissions officer, he did state that he had to maintain that role for “some years” before he was provided the opportunity to be promoted to a director level. He is currently the head of the admissions department at his institution.

Kody participated in two implicit bias trainings, both online, while working at his institution. One training discussed how to identify implicit bias while the other focused on how to mitigate implicit bias. On the importance of implicit bias training, Kody stated, “We meet people from different backgrounds, people of color, and people of different ages. I consider the training very important and very necessary.”

Leroy

Leroy is a Black male who works at a private higher education institution in the midwestern United States. He holds a master's degree in economics. Leroy currently works in the admissions department as a team member. His primary responsibility is to review prospective student applications and enter the information into the computer.

Leroy attended one implicit bias training in October of 2023, which was conducted online via the Zoom video-conferencing platform. The training focused on identifying and addressing implicit biases. From the perspective of his role as an admissions team member in relation to the training, he stated, "Bias is not good in college admissions. Being biased and giving admission to students based on color is not good. We were able to learn how to curtail that and remove it from our minds as staff." Based on his experience in the training, he was able to develop ideas on how to revise college admission policies to admit students based on merit to adhere to academic standards.

Melissa

Melissa is a Black female who previously worked at a public higher education institution in the northeastern United States. She holds a master's degree in counseling and is currently pursuing her doctorate degree, also in the field of counseling. When Melissa was in her master's program, she worked in the graduate admissions office through a work-study program. She communicated with prospective students as they came into the office, provided them with information about graduate programs, and gave tours of the graduate college.

Melissa attended one implicit bias training while she worked in the graduate admissions office. The training was completed online and provided attendees with different scenarios to help them think through what they would do in those situations. In regards to the training modality,

Melissa stated, “I thought it would have been better if it was face-to-face. People would get more out of it.”

Nancy

Nancy is a Native-American female who works at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States. She holds an undergraduate degree in exercise science and is currently pursuing her master’s degree in educational leadership. She has worked in the higher education industry for 5 years. Her career in higher education started as a transcript evaluator in the college admissions office working with non-traditional students. In that role, she would obtain prospective student transcripts and enter their transfer credits into the university’s student information system. After approximately 3 years, she transitioned into a recruitment role in the same department where she was the team lead for both the freshmen recruitment team and the transfer student recruitment team. Nancy is currently the associate director of undergraduate admissions. She supervises all admission representatives, admission counselors, assistant directors, and student workers. She also recruits local students and serves on several committees.

Nancy has attended quite a few bias and diversity trainings, both in person and online, over the last 5 years while working at the institution. Some of the face-to-face trainings she attended were at conferences. Nancy highlighted a session she attended at one of the conferences in which they were discussing how to recruit more minority students and the topic turned to implicit bias even though the session was about recruitment. She stated, “I was just sitting there taking in everything and noticed that Native-American people weren’t even represented on the chart.” Nancy spoke up and said to the presenter, “You say that you want this to be the most diverse case study that you’ll find, but you’re leaving out a group of people!” Nancy said, “That’s how the session turned into dialogue on implicit bias.”

Table 3*Admissions Staff/Faculty Participants*

Admissions staff/faculty participant	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Number of trainings attended	Training modality	Institutional region (U.S.)
Aiden	Male	White	3	F2F	Southeast
Beth	Female	White	2+	Online	Southeast
Cassandra	Female	White	2+	F2F	Southeast
Deidra	Female	White	2	F2F/Online	Northeast
Eve	Female	Native	2+	F2F/Online	Northeast
Heather	Female	White	1	Online	Southeast
Jay	Male	Black	1	Online	Southeast
Kody	Male	Black	2	Online	Midwest
Leroy	Male	Black	1	Online	Midwest
Melissa	Female	Black	1	Online	Northeast
Nancy	Female	Native	3+	F2F/Online	Southeast

Note. F2F denotes a face-to-face training experience.

Results

Extensive data analysis conducted on questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, and submitted documents revealed a total of over 500 codes initially but was refined into a final total of 161 codes and subcodes. The refined codes and subcodes were organized into nine categories. Upon a thorough review of the codes and categories, recurring themes emerged from each category across all data collection methods. The themes that were identified are as follows: Stressing the Importance of Bias Training, Checking Off the Boxes: Modality Matters, Developing Bias Training: Institutional Approaches to Training, and Recognizing the Need to Improve Admissions Criteria and Policies. Each theme also revealed one or more associated

subthemes except for one theme. Table 4 below provides an overview of the themes and associated subthemes.

Table 4

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2
Stressing the importance of bias training	Creating self-awareness	Increasing emotional intelligence
Checking off the boxes: modality matters	Face-to-face training preferred	Inadequacy of online training
Developing bias training: Institutional approaches	Staying at the surface versus deep diving	-
Recognizing the need to improve admissions criteria & policy	-	-

Stressing the Importance of Bias Training

The data revealed a strong consensus among college admission professionals that bias and diversity training is important, necessary, and crucial in higher education, especially in college and university admissions departments. Understanding what bias is and recognizing the signs of implicit bias is of the utmost importance when dealing with people. Based on participant feedback, admission professionals must be knowledgeable enough of bias to intervene if they observe someone becoming a target of bias.

The theme of stressing the importance of these trainings appeared across all data collection methods and each participant strongly stated the trainings' importance. On the importance of bias and diversity trainings and how the trainings may change an individual, Heather stated, "Some people struggle with empathy more than others. These trainings can

provide an opportunity for people to more fully understand the way their biases may affect others. Some people also struggle with self-reflection.” Aiden also said, “ Diversity trainings can help better understand the actions, lives, and behaviors of others.”

Creating Self-Awareness

A subtheme derived from the importance of bias and diversity training is the presence of creating self-awareness. Bias and diversity trainings can help individuals become more self-aware of their unconscious thoughts that may be negative without realizing it. The self-awareness subtheme appeared frequently throughout participant questionnaires and interviews. All 11 participants indicated that the trainings made them more self-aware and made them stop and think about their reactions or automatic thoughts.

These trainings can make you aware of biases you didn't know you had, help others gain language and perspective to better support students with diverse identities, become aware of resources and tools beyond yourself to recommend to students who need additional support, and give yourself the opportunity to work through these unconscious biases you hold to be a stronger professional in the field and a stronger advocate for all students.

(Eve).

Likewise, Cassandra said in her interview, “Everyone already had them (biases) and people typically know that you shouldn’t discriminate against people, but it did help me be more aware of it in a university setting. It made it more applicable to my role.”

Increasing Emotional Intelligence

Another subtheme that was derived from the importance of bias and diversity trainings was the concept of emotional intelligence. The impact that your unconscious thoughts may have on others is important for individuals to understand along with recognizing one’s own emotions.

The emotional intelligence subtheme revealed itself through different codes such as forcing self-reflection, challenging one's perceptions, encouraging personal growth, and improving cultural sensitivity. In her interview, Beth stated, "I have continuously improved my self-awareness and emotional intelligence based on how I use words and think about how something I say, although unintended may be taken by someone else due to their background." Like Beth, Heather said, "Sometimes I would ask myself why I had a certain reaction to something. I need to check myself and figure this out because that is not something I want to have a reaction to."

Checking Off the Boxes: Modality Matters

The next major theme that emerged from the data was the participants' experiences with the mode of delivery for the trainings they attended. This theme appeared in all the interviews because of specific questions on the modality of each participant's training. The way the information is presented significantly impacted their overall experience of the implicit bias and diversity training sessions. While three participants attended both in-person and online training sessions, six participants attended sessions only offered online. For those who attended via both modalities, their experiences vastly differed. When asked specific questions regarding his experience with an online training, Kody responded, "I felt very comfortable. It gave me an avenue to express myself." Conversely, when asked the same question, Deidra said, "I felt like I was just clicking through the presentation just to check off a box for completion. It was not engaging and contained very broad information."

Face-to-Face Training Preferred

Face-to-face meetings were the preferred modality for eight out of the 11 college admission participants for presenting bias and diversity information. Being physically present with other people provides an opportunity for training attendees to observe body language,

discuss different scenarios, remain engaged in dialogue, and fully absorb the information presented. Of those who attended bias and diversity training via both modalities, all indicated that in-person was better. The excitement in their voices and the expressions on their faces as they described their face-to-face training experiences made me feel as if I were in the training with them. Each participant described some of the aspects of their respective training courses and factors that kept them engaged. Cassandra said, “I think the breakout sessions we did really helped create some collaboration and interesting discussions.”

Nancy, who has attended bias trainings both online and in-person, stated,

I prefer the dialogue in person. It was kind of eye-opening just seeing so many different people with many interpretations of different types of bias. It was easy to bounce ideas back and forth of other colleagues from other walks of life.

Like Nancy, Aiden said, “It was easier to pay attention and know what was going on. It was fun to meet different people within the university that I worked with that I did not know personally to talk about the topic.”

Inadequacy of Online Training

In contrast to the face-to-face subtheme, the online modality for implicit bias and diversity training left a lot to be desired. For six participants, attending online trainings on the topic did not provide an adequate level of engagement or provide real information that could be used in their job. All participants except one indicated their training experiences were either “okay” or dismal because the training was presented online. Deirdra stated:

The basic online training offered by the admissions office was dry and did not evoke feelings that would inspire one to be aware of this problem. I felt like I was just clicking

through the presentation just to check off a box for completion. It was not engaging and contained very broad information.

Deidra's interview was the most compelling evidence of the inadequacy of online training. When she was describing her online training experience, I could feel the disappointment in her experience. Beth provided an interesting perspective regarding online implicit bias training. She said, "I felt like I was being talked *at* and being dictated like you have this bias. No, I do not. You do not know me (referencing the presenter)."

Developing Bias Training: Institutional Approaches

College and university admissions staff and faculty believe that university administrators should approach implicit bias training strategically and develop comprehensive training courses, sessions, workshops, or programs aimed at various employee populations, including specific sessions for admissions offices. Three of the training documents submitted by participants revealed a recurring theme of institutional approaches to diversity aspects; however, only two of them were aimed at admissions staff. For approximately half of the admissions staff, their respective universities provided an outlet to discuss real situations within admissions offices, how to handle situations when they arise, and strategies they can use in their jobs.

In a document submitted by Jay, his implicit bias training notes stated, "Universities must be ready to work in order to mitigate implicit bias to create fair and equitable admission processes. This includes consistent implicit bias training for staff, using holistic review practices, and diversifying admissions committees." Cassandra stated in her interview, "We did the classroom portion with the PowerPoint presentation and then we were able to break off into groups and do some exercises, which I thought was really interesting." Similar to Cassandra's

face-to-face experience, Deidra indicated, “The face-to-face training I had was unofficial in my department. It was more engaging with more dialogue.”

Staying at the Surface versus Deep Diving

A recurring subtheme across all interviews surrounded the information presented about implicit bias and diversity. The consensus among the admissions professionals was that most of the trainings only provided surface-level information as opposed to a deep dive into implicit bias. Heather stated, “I found these types of trainings to be repetitive and getting the same basic information all the time. I would like to see more nuanced trainings where the information is not as common.” Like Heather, Eve said, “We are not really deep-diving into anything. We could use something deeper that challenges some of the implicit biases that we are carrying.” Nine out of 11 participants walked away from their respective trainings with no strategies to mitigate implicit bias in their college admission roles; they only obtained basic, educational information.

Recognizing the Need to Improve Admissions Criteria and Policies

The last major theme to appear throughout all data collection methods is the need to revise college admission criteria and admission policies. Improvements to admissions processes and admissions policies, in general, could be made to focus on academic merits instead of aspects that could elicit implicit thoughts. Based on their experiences from the implicit bias and diversity trainings, several participants were able to brainstorm certain admission criteria that could be removed from the decision-making process.

When Cassandra was asked how her implicit bias training experience could help develop real-world solutions to implicit bias in the college admissions process, she replied, “It may be valuable to leave out certain aspects like an applicant’s age, race, or gender for making a decision.” Likewise, Leroy stated, “Let’s use codes and numbers for each candidate, which will

guide us to admit students based on merit.” Conversely, Beth stated, “I don’t know that any amount of training will really help because people are allowing their personal views to influence the admissions process on both sides.”

Outlier Data and Findings

Two unexpected outliers were identified during data analysis. Both outliers were significant enough to warrant attention, but did not align with a specific research question. Additionally, both outliers present an opportunity for future research.

Bias Training – Military Population

One outlier in the data revealed a different type of training that was related to bias, but centered around active-duty military and veterans. Aiden was the only participant to describe a training that he attended that focused on active-duty military and veterans in college. The training aimed to help faculty and staff understand how veterans see the world differently and how to approach them. He said:

It was talking about how veterans would come into a classroom and they always sat in the same seat. On an exam day, the veteran would come in and someone else would be sitting in their preferred seat. They would get so overwhelmed they would leave and not take the exam – all because someone was in their seat.

Although this information is not connected to a research question or related to college admissions, it is important to note since that any group of people, such as members of the military, can be subjected to bias. Aiden said, “It was really cool and interesting.”

Sole Faculty Participant

The second outlier identified was the occupation of one of the participants. Considering the participant criteria included faculty members who review (or have reviewed) applications for

admissions decisions, Jay was the only faculty member within the participant sample. His experiences with bias and diversity training in relation to his role as a faculty reviewer provided insight into what colleges may need to do to mitigate bias in the admissions process.

Research Question Responses

This section provides concise answers to the research questions surrounding the study. Selected participant responses will accompany each question to validate the answers provided to the research questions. Each question and answer will tell a story of participant experiences with their respective implicit bias and diversity trainings.

Central Research Question

What are the perspectives and lived experiences of admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training while working at a higher education institution? The participants' perspective is that while implicit/unconscious bias and diversity trainings are important and can spark discussion amongst colleagues, colleges and universities are not providing in-depth, comprehensive in-person training opportunities for admission staff and faculty reviewers to mitigate implicit bias in the college admissions process. Melissa stated, "I was fascinated and curious because I learned how much of an important topic it is, especially in college and understanding different backgrounds and cultures." Likewise, Cassandra said, "We did the classroom portion with the PowerPoint presentation and then we were able to break off into groups and do some exercises, which I thought was really interesting." Jay described his experience as, "It helped to improve me as a human being and decision-making to ensure I am not biased. I got to know a lot of things that I was not aware of prior to attending the training."

Sub-Question One

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive their social interactions and upbringing to influence their experiences during and after the implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions? Most participants have either observed implicit bias first-hand or have been a victim of bias themselves. Their personal experiences sparked a deep interest in the topic and allowed them to connect with other colleagues with the same experiences in their personal lives. Nancy said,

I had a professor in college and we were going into our culminating project. My topic was on the lack of student support services for Native-American students. My professor said, ‘Oh, you’re one of *them* so you believe this way?’

Nancy replied to the professor, “No, I just feel like I needed help.” While Eve did not elaborate on her upbringing, she did state, “I knew what implicit bias was through proxy and through family members and that there are certain opinions. Some were judgmental and some were more neutral.” In an interesting twist, Deidra left the admissions office to work for another department due to the biases that were being displayed by her colleagues. The social interactions she witnessed were what drove her to pursue another opportunity. She said, “There was bias against Blacks and migrants. Colleagues would make comments about appearances, smells, and being frustrated with students of color entering the office. They preferred working with White students.” Jay’s social interactions with prospective students and their families provided an interesting look at bias in the college admissions process. He said, “Sometimes they (applicants)

want to bribe us (admission officers) to admit them. Admissions officers find it very difficult to say no and because of that, they become bias to those students.”

Sub-Question Two

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive their experiences of implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions should drive policy changes within university admissions processes? Participant experiences with implicit/unconscious bias and diversity trainings ignited a firestorm of ideas of how to revise college and university admissions processes and policies to mitigate the presence of implicit bias. Cassandra said, “Leave out certain aspects that nobody really needs to know like an applicant’s age, race, previous college, or gender for making decisions.” Leroy said, “Let us use codes and numbers for each candidate and remove the names. Every student would know their own code and would guide us to admit students based on merit for better academic standards.” Nancy indicated that institutions should understand that “this is not a one-size-fits-all gig and there’s no college that fits every single student.” Heather’s response to real-world solutions in the college admissions process was, “Try to find a system of hiding names because a name can be a strong indicator of that person or create a system where applications only have reference numbers.”

Sub-Question Three

How do college admissions staff and faculty reviewers perceive implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions have impacted their mindsets or behaviors regarding their roles in the college admissions process? Participants’ perspectives of implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training had a profound impact on their mindsets and behaviors. Their collective experiences reflected a mindset of self-awareness, self-reflection, and an increase in emotional intelligence. Beth stated, “I have continuously improved my self-

awareness and emotional intelligence based on how I use words and think about how something I say, although unintended may be taken by someone else due to their background.” Deidra said, “As a White-passing marginalized person it has changed my thoughts for the better. It was very perspective-setting for me.” Heather indicated that the training “did not really change my mindset, but if anything, it did help me to become more self-aware.”

Summary

The implicit/unconscious bias and diversity training experiences of college admissions staff and faculty provided great insight into the phenomenon of implicit bias and associated professional development trainings. During data analysis, recurring themes and subthemes emerged across all data collection methods. The themes and subthemes included the importance of bias and diversity training, the advantages, and disadvantages of the modalities of each training, institutional approaches to bias and diversity training, and the need to improve admissions criteria and policies.

Participant experiences highlighted the importance of implicit bias and diversity training, which would create self-awareness and increase emotional intelligence. Their experiences also revealed the importance of the training modality as face-to-face training opportunities were preferred over online training opportunities. How a higher education institution approaches these types of trainings is crucial, too. If an implicit bias or diversity training session is too broad and basic, attendees will not take away important facts and concepts. Many participants experienced surface-level implicit bias and diversity training sessions and were not given the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue that would have created lasting impacts. On the flip side, a training session that dives deep into implicit bias situations, especially in the context of college and university admissions, participants will be equipped to recognize potential bias and mitigate

the impact of bias for prospective students. College admissions staff and faculty who complete these types of trainings can be a catalyst for change and revise admissions criteria and admissions policies to mitigate incidences of implicit bias within the college admissions process.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of individuals who work or have worked within college admissions and have attended an implicit/unconscious bias or diversity training. This chapter includes a summary of themes from the previous chapter, a critical discussion of the findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

Discussion

This section of the chapter provides a summary of the themes and subthemes that were identified during data analysis. This section also details a critical discussion on the findings from the perspective of the researcher. The critical discussion provides an opportunity for the researcher to relay specific thoughts and comments on the findings.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Data analysis revealed the recurrence of several themes and subthemes. First, the theme of stressing the importance of bias and diversity trainings revealed a strong consensus among college admission professionals that these trainings are important, necessary, and crucial in higher education, especially in college and university admissions departments. Subthemes derived from the importance of bias and diversity training were self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Bias and diversity trainings can help individuals become more self-aware of their unconscious thoughts that may be negative without realizing it. The impact that your unconscious thoughts may have on others is important for individuals to understand along with recognizing one's own emotions.

Second, the theme surrounding the modality of the bias and diversity training indicated the way the information is presented significantly impacted their overall experience of the implicit bias and diversity training sessions. Subthemes derived from the training modality highlighted the preference for face-to-face training opportunities versus the inadequacy of online training opportunities. Being physically present with other people provides an opportunity for training attendees to observe body language, discuss different scenarios, remain engaged in dialogue, and fully absorb the information presented.

Third, institutional approaches to developing bias and diversity training also emerged as a recurring theme. This theme highlighted the need for institutions to approach bias and diversity trainings on a more strategic level. A subtheme derived from the approaches to bias and diversity training revealed that institutions provide surface-level information as opposed to a deep-dive into bias and diversity.

Finally, the last theme to emerge from the data recognized the need to improve admissions criteria and policies. Improvements to admissions processes and admissions policies, in general, could be made to focus on academic merits instead of aspects that could elicit implicit thoughts. Based on their experiences from the implicit bias and diversity trainings, several participants were able to brainstorm certain admission criteria that could be removed from the decision-making process.

From the Researcher's Perspective

As human beings, our minds are wired for automatic thoughts and snap judgments when it comes to people, places, or situations. Whether it be through our interactions or from other avenues, we create internal opinions and form biases, which could be positive, negative, or both. Implicit biases can seep into every facet of our lives; however, being educated on what implicit

bias is and how it impacts people and situations is the key to mitigating potentially damaging thoughts, especially in the college and university setting. My participants' experiences convey that although implicit/unconscious bias educational information is important, equipping individuals with specific strategies in everyday practice is critical to keep implicit biases from creeping into the college and university admissions processes.

Based on the findings from my study, while colleges and universities do provide professional development opportunities for their staff surrounding the topic of implicit bias and diversity, it appears that many institutions are offering these opportunities out of an obligation and do not appear to be genuinely concerned about the impact that implicit biases have, specifically in the college and university admissions processes. Participant experiences indicate that training sessions and webinars offered only appear to be surface-level information and explain what implicit bias is, how to recognize it, and create individual self-awareness. Based on the training experiences of most participants, these types of basic trainings may be good for those who do not know what it is; however, in-depth, specialized training may be more appropriate for those who are already knowledgeable about the concept.

Many of the trainings were university-wide or provided by external vendors and were not specific to departments or roles. Because many of the bias and diversity trainings were designed this way, attendees are left to their interpretations of how they should address their own implicit biases. Moreover, because implicit bias has been found and documented within the college admissions process, admissions professionals were not given a specialized training opportunity designed to arm them with strategies to mitigate implicit bias in their roles.

The way that the implicit bias and diversity information is presented is paramount to attendees walking out of the training feeling as if they are better prepared to recognize and stop

bias in its tracks and mitigate potential biases in the future. Online training sessions only offer basic information on implicit bias and do not allow the attendees to physically interact with other human beings nor do they provide the opportunity for deep discussions or personal observations of body language. Additionally, online implicit bias and diversity training sessions do not allow colleagues to become comfortable enough with the topic to intervene when they observe biases from others, especially within college and university admissions offices as observed by some of the participants. Being face-to-face with colleagues to discuss implicit biases or diversity aspects can allow for deeper discussion on a difficult topic, spark the creation of ideas between colleagues, and build trust.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The following sections will detail the implications for specific policies created by state legislators or governing boards for university systems and implications for institutional practices created by university administrators. The insightful information obtained from the participants will assist college and university administrators in developing and/or revising new and existing policies should they choose to do so. Based on the participant's experiences of implicit/unconscious bias and diversity professional development training sessions, programs, and webinars, it appears that both policy and practice revisions will need to take place in higher education institutions across the country.

Implications for Policy

Based on the insights gleaned from the participants' experiences of implicit bias and diversity trainings, governing boards of university systems (i.e. state university systems) and state legislators may need to develop and revise policies that relate to both professional development opportunities and college admissions requirements. While each higher education

institution may have its respective requirements, many state university systems have governing boards at the state level that determine admission requirements and associated policies. These policies may need to contain information about implicit bias, and require in-depth, in-person training opportunities on campuses along with a guide for university administrators to develop and facilitate such training. Policies that are either developed or existing policies that are revised may also need to contain consequences for institutions that do not follow the policies as written. Policies developed or revised will also need to remain in compliance with any federal laws and regulations that are in existence.

Implications for Practice

Colleges and universities have a responsibility to ensure that all internal and external stakeholders are respected and protected. This is especially true for the college and university admissions process where employee implicit biases may be the reason that a prospective student does not get accepted into the institution. As a result of some of the participants' implicit bias and diversity training experiences, some of the participants were able to brainstorm potential revisions of college admissions criteria to mitigate incidences of implicit bias in the decision-making process. Potential revisions of admissions criteria include the removal of an applicant's age, race, gender, and the names of previous institutions from the application and assigning a prospective student a code instead of using their names. Many higher education institutions create their own criteria to review for rendering admissions decisions to prospective students. They may elect to keep their existing criteria despite the implications that revising admissions criteria will mitigate implicit bias in their processes.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

In this section, the theoretical and empirical implications of my study will be addressed in detail. More specifically, this section details how my study confirms or refutes previous research conducted along with how my study aligns with the guiding theories chosen for the research study. Additionally, I will highlight how my study adds unique insights into the phenomenon of implicit bias and diversity trainings as it relates to college admissions staff and faculty.

Empirical Implications

Considering the hot topics of biases and diversity have exploded in recent years, higher education institutions and other organizations developed and implemented different initiatives to combat the bias issue. There have been numerous research studies conducted on implicit bias and diversity aspects as well as training sessions, programs, webinars, and workshops designed to create awareness of bias. Higher education institutions are implementing such trainings predominantly online, but some institutions are offering face-to-face training opportunities.

Training Importance and Takeaways. The findings from my study surrounding the purpose of implicit bias and diversity training seem to corroborate the previous research, which stated that these types of trainings can create awareness of one's own biases and assist in changing an individual's attitude (Pennington et al., 2022). This finding within my research implies that training on the topic is necessary for basic knowledge; however, institutions are only providing basic information and not anything of substance that can be put into practice. Attendees of implicit bias and diversity trainings are only provided with surface-level information but are not provided with an opportunity to delve into and discuss specific situations with colleagues, especially within their own department such as the college admissions office.

Training Modality and Institutional Approaches. While some participants were able to complete an in-person implicit bias or diversity training or a mixture of both, most of the participants experienced online training with only a presentation. The findings from my research surrounding the modality of the training confirms the previous research conducted that implicit bias and diversity trainings sessions, programs, or workshops that are held in-person provides a better experience and outcome for the attendees (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017). The implications for higher education institutions are that any online training program or webinars they are currently offering must be repurposed for face-to-face training. This would also mean that in today's technologically advanced world, higher education institutions may need to get creative for employees who work remotely and are not physically on campus.

Admissions Policies. Several participants in my research study observed implicit bias within the college admissions process and between colleagues at their respective institutions. The bias observed is why one of the participants left the admissions office to pursue a role in another department. This finding confirms the previous research that had been conducted on implicit biases found within the college admissions process (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020; Maxfield et al., 2019; Nabil et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020; Weise et al., 2023). The implications of this would mean that implicit biases are still alive and well in the college admissions process despite professional development training opportunities that are offered to employees. Additionally, my research has confirmed that admissions professionals are not given a specialized training opportunity designed to arm them with strategies to mitigate implicit bias in their roles. Previous research conducted on implicit bias within the college admissions process and implicit bias, or diversity trainings offered to institutional employees confirms this finding

(Cooley et al., 2018; Fuller, 2021; Gunarathne et al., 2022; Houser & Lemmons, 2017; Rice et al., 2021).

Contribution to Existing Research

As a result of the numerous research studies that have already been conducted on implicit bias and diversity in the higher education industry and on trainings surrounding this topic, my research adds another layer of findings and results, but for a population that has not been studied. Considering that relatively few studies were conducted on the experiences of the attendees of these types of trainings within higher education, my research focused solely on the experiences of the admissions staff and faculty reviewers as I did not come across any studies on this population. My research study provides higher education institutions with evidence that implicit bias still exists within the college admissions process and college administrators must design and develop specialized training programs for admissions staff and faculty that review applications for decisions to mitigate incidences of implicit bias.

Theoretical Implications

The theories that guided my study were Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) and Bandura's (1971) theory of social learning. Both theories played an integral role in the research study as both theories focus on behavioral aspects of individuals. Through the interview questions, participants explained their behavior and thought processes before, during, and after their respective implicit bias or diversity trainings. The behavioral cues for each participant varied because some of the participants had personal experiences of bias in their childhood, which lends credence to both Ajzen's (1991) TPB and Bandura's (1971) theory of social learning. The personal experiences of bias during their childhood and teenage years made them hyperaware of their own biases and piqued their interest when implicit bias training opportunities

were offered. The participants who had personal experiences of bias were motivated to obtain all they could out of the training to help them as opposed to the participants who felt as if the trainings were a waste of time and redundant. The implications of this in relation to future implicit bias or diversity trainings that institutions may require their employees to attend are that some participants may only go because they are required and may not pay attention; thus, not learning information needed and repeat the same behaviors. Both theories can apply to future studies surrounding implicit bias and diversity professional development trainings, programs, and workshops for higher education employees.

Limitations and Delimitations

In this section, the limitations and obstacles that I encountered during my study will be explained. Delimitations of my study will also be addressed and provide insight on why certain decisions were made such as the methodology chosen and not choosing a specific site. More specifically, I will explain my decision to open the study to anyone who met the criteria.

Limitations

Several limitations existed within my study. First, it was rather difficult to obtain participants and adjustments had to be made to my sample population and participant recruitment strategies. Second, I encountered fraudulent participants who only pretended to meet the criteria so they could financially benefit from the participation incentive. These participants submitted responses to the questionnaire; however, during their interview, it was evident that they did not meet the criteria and they left the interview. For the ones that were identified as fraudulent, I immediately separated their data from the true participants and did not include any of their data in my findings or results. Third, I experienced a technology failure in one of the interviews where the Microsoft Teams platform did not record or transcribe due to storms in my location on

that day. To obtain accurate information from the participant, I emailed her the interview questions and she provided her answers. It would have been inappropriate for me to rely on my notes as they would not have been a true representation of her thoughts. Lastly, only one of my participants was employed as a faculty member who reviews applications for admissions decisions.

Delimitations

For my research, I chose to pursue a phenomenology study because of the increasing phenomenon of implicit bias and diversity training programs that higher education institutions and organizations are implementing. I chose to use the transcendental phenomenology approach considering I have had my own experience with an implicit bias training and have spent most of my higher education career in university admissions and enrollment management. I chose this approach because I did not want to impose my own opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings on the participants or influence their responses. Using this approach required me to put my feelings and biases aside and focus solely on the participants' experiences of implicit bias or diversity trainings as admissions professionals. Initially, participants at one specific site were the intended population; however, after not receiving any responses to participate, I had to eliminate a specific site and focus on a setting to obtain the required number of participants. The decision to allow anyone who met the criteria proved to be a challenge but was a blessing in disguise because I was able to engage participants in different parts of the country and different types of institutions.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many different directions in which to take future research studies on the topic of implicit bias and diversity training sessions in relation to admission staff and faculty or even

other employee populations. For example, a quantitative study could be conducted to explore the percentage of participants who became more biased after the training than before the training. The results of this type of study would either confirm or refute a previous research study that found that such training sessions may activate stereotypes instead of decreasing stereotyping behavior (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Future studies could examine the effects of attending multiple bias or diversity trainings and if attendees become more aware of biases, become desensitized to the issue, or tune out altogether. Moreover, future studies could also examine employee attitudes toward involuntary bias and diversity trainings versus voluntary trainings.

More research in this area may be needed on various institutional populations. First, since only one of my participants was employed as a faculty member, further research on this population may highlight the potential bias and diversity challenges faculty and committee members may face when reviewing college applications. Second, as one of my participants attended a bias-related training about military members, future research could be conducted on this population since they could also be subjected to bias within the admissions process as well. Third, the university administrator population (presidents, vice presidents, deans, and department chairs) could be studied to gauge their experiences, thoughts, perceptions and attitudes regarding implicit bias and diversity professional development training. Lastly, more research may be needed regarding the individuals who conduct the training programs. More specifically, the research could surround the topics of “trainer” preparedness, presentation, and trainer effectiveness. The results and findings of this research could either confirm or refute findings from previous research, which suggested that outcomes of implicit bias or diversity training opportunities may reveal the need for trainers to improve upon their trainer competences (Froncek et al., 2018; Rohmann et al., 2017).

There have been at least two state and federal legislative regulations that have been within the last year (2023) that specifically revolve around DEI initiatives and college/university admissions offices. In Florida and several other states, state legislators have passed a law banning DEI initiatives and offices on state higher education campuses (The Florida Senate, 2023), which could also mean an end to developing and implementing specific bias and diversity training sessions, workshops, or programs for institution employees. Research studies could be conducted on the effects of the legislation on bias and diversity aspects within state schools in these states as it relates to diversity and bias trainings. Additionally, future research studies could be conducted on the recent legislation from the Supreme Court reversing affirmative action (AA) policies across public and private in the United States (The Supreme Court of the United States, 2023) and the impact such legislation has on enrollment and holistic admission reviews.

Conclusion

The problem identified in the existing literature was that those involved in the college admissions process were not provided with professional development opportunities in which to develop potential solutions to bias. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of university admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session while working at a higher education institution. A transcendental phenomenological research design was used to focus on participants' lived experiences of these types of trainings and to ensure that researcher bias did not influence participant responses. Participants in the study were individuals from various institutions, regions, and ethnicities. Each participant attended one or more bias and diversity trainings with varying modalities. Data collection methods included a questionnaire, interviews,

and training documents. Data analysis strategies included coding participant responses, separating codes into categories, and identifying themes across all codes.

The study found that while institutions understand the importance of such trainings, university administrators do not provide in-depth training opportunities meant to arm employees with strategies to mitigate biases within their institutional roles. The findings provide evidence that universities are not providing specialized, face-to-face training opportunities for admissions staff and faculty application reviewers to implement strategies to mitigate implicit biases within the college admissions process. As a result of the findings, universities should consider revising admissions criteria and policies to remove any potential biases that may prevent prospective students from being admitted into college. Furthermore, future quantitative and qualitative research can be conducted on these types of trainings, different populations, required bias and diversity trainings, and the impact of recent state and federal regulations.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 29, 2024

Sabrina Capps
Laura Jones

Re: Modification - IRB-FY23-24-893 THROUGH THE LENS OF ADMISSIONS STAFF AND FACULTY REVIEWERS: HOW IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING MAY MITIGATE BIAS IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS PROCESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Sabrina Capps, Laura Jones,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY23-24-893 THROUGH THE LENS OF ADMISSIONS STAFF AND FACULTY REVIEWERS: HOW IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING MAY MITIGATE BIAS IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS PROCESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to make the following changes has been approved:

1. To recruit participants using social media,
2. To increase the amount of the gift card to \$50 and also [change] the type of gift card to be from Amazon instead of Starbucks,
3. No longer require participants to have attended "an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session (in-person or online) within the last five years *at a public higher education institution in the southeastern United States*" but include individuals who completed the training "while working in a higher education institution,"
4. No longer require participants to be currently employed staff or faculty members who review applications for admissions but include staff and faculty who did so within the last five years but are no longer employed at university,
5. Have participants answer screening questions via a Google doc linked to the recruitment flyer, and
6. Provide your consent form via email to eligible participants

Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. **For a PDF of your modification letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Modification under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. If your modification required you to submit revised documents, they can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not

hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of the Project: Through the Lens of Admissions Staff and Faculty Reviewers: How Implicit Bias Training May Mitigate Bias in the University Admissions Process: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Sabrina L. Capps, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a full-time or part-time staff or faculty member who currently works or has worked within the last five years in the admissions department, or a faculty member who reviews or has reviewed within the last five years applications for admissions decisions and have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session (in-person or online) within the last five (5) years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of college admissions staff and faculty reviewers who have attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session within the last five (5) years.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a Google Form questionnaire. Estimated completion is fifteen (15) to thirty (30) minutes.
2. Submit via email any documents retained from completed implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions (in-person or online). Estimated completion time is fifteen (15) minutes.
3. Take part in an audio/video recorded virtual interview via a video-conferencing platform. Estimated completion time is one (1) hour.
4. Review transcribed interview documentation to ensure the accuracy and validity of the interview. Estimated completion time is thirty (30) minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive direct benefits from participating in the study.

Benefits to society include information added to the existing body of knowledge on implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions in a university setting from the perspectives of

Liberty University IRB-FY23-24-893 Approved on 4-29-2024
--

university admissions staff and faculty reviewers, possible improvements and suggestions for future training sessions, and possible strategies for mitigating implicit bias within the university admissions process.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected, external hard drive, and stay in a locked office. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive in a locked office for three years and then erased. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the review of transcribed interviews, participants will receive a \$50 electronic gift card to Amazon.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Sabrina Capps. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at scapps@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Laura Jones, at lejones2@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University
IRB-FY23-24-893
Approved on 4-29-2024

Appendix C

Recruitment Survey

1. Have you attended an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training session, workshop, or program (in-person or online) in the last five (5) years?
2. Do you currently work (or have previously worked) in the admissions department or are you a faculty member that reviews applications to render an admissions decision?

Appendix D
Questionnaire

1. Describe your own definition of implicit bias, unconscious bias, and diversity.
2. How do you feel about colleges and universities implementing implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training sessions?
3. In what ways may an implicit bias, unconscious bias, or diversity training change the thoughts, feelings, or perceptions of an individual?

Appendix E

Sample Interview Transcript

Sabrina Capps Dissertation Research Study Interview-20240516_174754-Meeting Recording
May 16, 2024, 4:49PM
58m 26s

Capps, Sabrina 8:44

Thank you for jumping on.

I appreciate you being willing to participate in my dissertation research study.

Heather 8:55

Of course.

Capps, Sabrina 8:57

If at any time you are uncomfortable with answering a question, you can just say I prefer not to answer because this is a sensitive topic.

It can bring about feelings of anxiety and you know, distress and things like that.

Also, if at any time you would like to stop the participation, you're free to do so, and we'll cut the interview off.

Capps, Sabrina 9:50

OK, alright.

Describe your educational background and career through your current position.

Heather 9:58

Yeah.

So I started at --- right out of high school.

I got a bachelors in English creative writing.

I took a year off once I graduated and then I started my Masters of Education in college Student Affairs administration.

Through my undergrad I worked some Student positions on campus.

I was a resident assistant for RA and an orientation leader for OL so I kind of got some admission experience.

Those technically well, the OL fell under the admissions category, but I wasn't like doing admission stuff.

And then umm, I was working in the Deans office for the at the time it was the College of Education, the College of Education -----.

Umm, I worked in the Dean's office just as like the front desk.

Kind of a secretary position of sorts.

UM, I quit that and I went and worked at a law firm for a couple of years.

And then I started my program, my master's program.

While I was at the law firm and then I got a position in the Graduate School at ---.

I was there for a little over two years and now I have moved over to the Registrar's office, still at ---.

Capps, Sabrina 11:32

OK.

Thank you.

So if you would provide a detailed overview of your past position within the College Admissions Office.

Heather 11:41

Yeah.

So I was one of the Umm, Admissions coordinators, so my role within Graduate School was to basically handle all of the applications as they came through as students submitted them, making sure that they were in our system correctly, that the students got their Student numbers that, you know, they had access to all the things they needed to proceed with their application.

And then I was also handling all of the documents that Student sent in for their application.

So resume, you know, personal statements, letters of recommendation, all those sorts of things.

Uh, I handle all of that and made sure that those were what the coordinators wanted in as far as like does this look like a resume?

You know, the student may have labeled it a resume, but maybe they mislabeled it and it was actually some kind of personal document.

So I kind of vetted the documents in that sense.

Umm.

I you know, if the department said that they wanted 3 letters of recommendation, I made sure that the student submitted 3 letters of recommendation before we pass it along to the department.

So I wasn't making decisions as to the quality of the documents. I was making sure that they were what they were supposed to be, what the department was asking for.

Umm.

And then I also had some responsibilities.

UM, some of the programs, like the nursing program for example, had kind of a more involved admissions process.

That, you know, we kept up spreadsheets and, you know, they were a lot more hands on with their applicants.

So I helped facilitate that, making sure that the departments have what they needed and had all of the information available to them.

Umm, I did a lot of reporting of like numbers like how many applicants do we have for this program this semester versus last semester.

I did a lot of that stuff.

I worked with our third party partner who kind of.

They didn't run the programs, but they were UM how to describe it. They were more responsible for the recruitment for those programs and in some of the programs they were Advising the students after admission.

They were the kind of the first point of contact for students in those very specific programs.

So I worked very closely with them.

I worked very closely with the departments and the department chairs when it came to admission requirements.

So sometimes you know telling them like, OK, well, this is what it says here, but you're telling the students this.

So, like, let's make sure that all of this matches those sorts of things. Umm.

I feel like I did a million other things that I'm probably forgetting now because it was just like I was always so busy.

There was a lot to do, but that was that was the bulk of it.

The majority of it.

Capps, Sabrina 15:09

OK.

So describe your thoughts about implicit bias prior to attending any type of training.

Heather 15:19

Umm, so before I did any training on it, I already knew about it.

Umm I've been required and I think like high school to read this book by Malcolm Gladwell.

Umm.

And it was called blink.

He's written a bunch of books and I've read a bunch of them, but I think blink is a specific one.

I'm thinking of umm and it talked about the way that people kind of make split second decisions unconsciously.

So I was already familiar with the idea of it.

UM of like implicit bias and kind of the effects that it has on people.

Umm, so I already knew about it already knew that.

Like, it's obviously a bad thing.

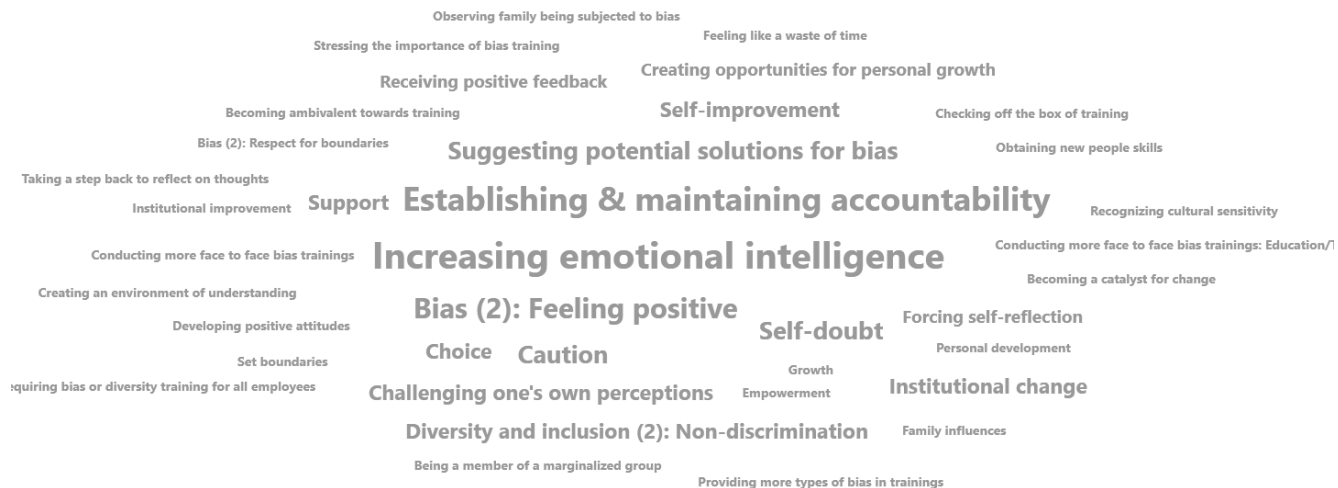
Umm, because you're not consciously making these decisions and an implicit bias can sometimes go against what you logically feel, but you don't know that you necessarily have this implicit bias.

So it can be very tricky like that.

So I always knew that it was a bad thing, that it is a thing that happens and that it can have very negative effects on other people.

Appendix F

Sample Code Cloud



Appendix G

Document Sample

Notes from an online implicit bias training

Implicit bias training exercises: implicit bias and admission reviewers.

IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING BACKGROUND:

The importance of hosting implicit bias training for faculty members, admission officers is to indicate the present implicit bias challenges in offering and reviewing admissions for students. Implicit bias finds it way in all situations and University admissions is no exception. As an admission officer, faculty member, and other discipline department of the Universities, you know firsthand the struggle to review admissions fairly when unconscious prejudices inevitably creep in. New approach to be adopted through the help of technology as they will aim to reduce the impact of implicit bias in admissions decisions.

Implicit bias area of coverage:

- Implicit bias and the Universities.
- The impact of students on implicit bias.
- What University can do
- The bad records of implicit bias to student's application.
- The urgent need of awareness
- What schools should do
- Training conclusion

IMPLICIT BIAS AND THE UNIVERSITIES:

Implicit bias can affect university admissions. Implicit bias is basically when we unconsciously associate certain traits with social groups, like gender, race, age, etc. And these associations can influence how we perceive and treat people without even realizing it.

When it comes to college admissions, things like an applicant's name, race or gender could potentially sway a reviewer without them meaning to. Like a black-sounding name might make the reviewer think the kid is not as smart without them consciously thinking that.