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# The rich get richer: predicting participation in voluntary diversity training

CAROL T. KULIK<sup>1\*</sup>, MOLLY B. PEPPER<sup>2</sup>,  
LORIANN ROBERSON<sup>3</sup> AND SHARON K. PARKER<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Management, City West Campus, University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 5001 Australia*

<sup>2</sup>*Box 9, Gonzaga University Spokane, WA 99258-0009 USA*

<sup>3</sup>*Teachers College/Columbia University, New York, NY 10027 USA*

<sup>4</sup>*Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN UK*

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## Summary

This research examined whether trainee demographics and pre-training competence predicted participation in voluntary diversity training. Results indicate that demographic variables had no impact on interest in training (Study One) or on actual training participation (Study Two). However, pre-training competence levels had a positive effect on both outcomes. More competent trainees expressed more interest in additional training (Study One) and were more likely to attend a voluntary training session (Study Two). The authors suggest that trainees with low competence in the diversity domain are unaware of their low competence levels and therefore are not motivated to participate in training programs designed to increase diversity competence. Implications of these findings for organizations offering voluntary diversity training are discussed. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

## Introduction

'Diversity training' is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide array of specific programs designed to train and direct employees in behaviors that display an openness and receptiveness to diversity (Button, 2001; McKay & Avery, 2005). Initially, diversity training focused specifically on race and gender. Because of its focus on the organizational recruiting, hiring, and promotion practices that might limit opportunities for women and members of racial minority groups, this training was often described as equal opportunity training. More recently, diversity training has expanded to encompass a broader range of diversity dimensions (e.g., disability status, cultural differences) and places a stronger emphasis on individual-level attitudes and motivation (Crane, 2004; Egdigwe, 2005). Whether the organization adopts a narrow (race and gender) or broad (multiple diversity dimensions) focus, diversity training is designed to help employees take a positive, proactive approach toward diversity that goes beyond passive non-discrimination (Brief & Barsky, 2000). Training brings subtle forms of

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\* Correspondence to: Carol T. Kulik, School of Management, City West Campus, University of South Australia, GPO Box 2471, Adelaide, South Australia, 5001 Australia. E-mail: carol.kulik@unisa.edu.au

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discrimination to the forefront and teaches employees how to counteract them (McKay & Avery, 2005). It also aims to give employees knowledge and skills they can use in everyday work situations (Egodigwe, 2005).

Diversity training is often seen as the cornerstone of diversity initiatives. Cox (Cox, 1994; Cox & Beale, 1997), for example, views education and training as a primary driver of organizational change, and recommends that training *always* be included in a diversity program. Organizations seem to have heeded this advice. Training is one of the most common activities included in diversity initiatives, used in 67 per cent of U.S. organizations (Esen, 2005). Internationally, multinational firms are increasingly adopting diversity training programs (Egodigwe, 2005). Further, in a thorough review of the diversity training literature, Kulik and Roberson (in press) concluded that, with sufficient attention to pre-training needs assessment and post-training organizational support, diversity training has a positive impact on employee knowledge and behavior. Research suggests that diversity training participants leave the training with more knowledge about the value of diversity (e.g., Hanover & Cellar, 1998; Ellis & Sonnenfeld, 1994). Further, diversity training can improve employee diversity skills and on-the-job diversity behavior (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, in press; Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2001). Overall, the evidence indicates that diversity training can be used to effectively disseminate information about organizational diversity goals and to teach specific diversity management skills (Kulik & Roberson, in press).

However, employee resistance to these training programs has been an ongoing problem (Burke & Black, 1997; Flynn, 1999; Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004). Many employees perceive equal opportunity programs as offering an unfair advantage to the non-traditional employee, rather than leveling the playing field for all (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivancevich, 1999). Diversity training has been described as 'punishment for the insensitive' (Rossett & Bickham, 1994) and some employees feel that these programs unfairly blame white men for the problems experienced by women and members of racial minority groups (Flynn, 1999). Recommendations that organizations initiate mandatory diversity training programs have prompted public commentators to criticize diversity training as 'thought reform in disguise' (Silverglate, 2005).

In response to backlash concerns, many organizations are choosing to make diversity training opportunities available to employees on a voluntary basis instead of requiring employee participation. In a national survey of human resource professionals, Esen (2005) found that 60 per cent of organizations made diversity training mandatory for top-level executives, but only about 50 per cent of organizations made diversity training mandatory for non-managerial employees. This emphasis on voluntary diversity training is consistent with a general trend for organizations to offer developmental opportunities to employees, but to leave the choice of whether to participate in these opportunities to the individual (Guthrie & Schwoerer, 1994).

The training literature is divided on the value of voluntary training (Tomlinson, 2002). Requiring that employees attend training can be inefficient, as some participants will already have the requisite skills and no need for training (Bernardin & Russell, 1998). However, the success of voluntary training depends on the 'right' people volunteering based on their self-assessed need (Guthrie & Schwoerer, 1994). Ideally, a voluntary training program would attract those individuals who are most in need of skill development, and who are in positions where improved skills in the training domain would be of greatest benefit to the organization.

### *Who participates in voluntary diversity training?*

The choice to participate in any voluntary training depends on several motivational factors: Trainees are more motivated to participate in training that they perceive will lead to valued outcomes, and trainees are more motivated to participate when they are aware of a personal need for training (i.e., a

skill deficit that the training will correct) (Noe, 1986, 1999). In the diversity domain, these motivational factors suggest two important predictors that might influence an employee's interest in diversity training, and his or her choice to participate in voluntary opportunities.

First, trainee demographics may be related to trainee perceptions of the value of diversity training and therefore influence trainee motivation to attend a voluntary training session (Kidder et al., 2004). Diversity initiatives, including equal opportunity and diversity training, are designed to remove obstacles to the hiring and promotion of non-traditional employees and make organizations more multicultural. Such changes are likely to have adverse effects on currently dominant groups by re-distributing power and resources (Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Mor-Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998). As a result, diversity research demonstrates that diversity initiatives in North America are generally received with more enthusiasm by women and people of color than by men and whites (Alderfer, Alderfer, Bell, & Jones, 1992; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Mor-Barak et al., 1998). In contexts where white men occupy the largest proportion of the organizational hierarchy, women, non-whites, and other non-traditional employees might be more likely to volunteer for training, since they are most likely to benefit from diversity initiatives. Unfortunately, programs that do not attract members of the dominant demographic group are unlikely to result in any systemic organizational change (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999).

*Hypothesis 1.* Women, non-whites, and older employees will be more interested in voluntary training on diversity issues than traditional employees.

Second, low pre-training competency levels in the training domain might trigger a perceived need for training and therefore influence trainee motivation to attend a voluntary training session. Unfortunately, research suggests that people who have low knowledge or skill levels may be unaware of their skill deficits. In a wide range of skill domains including social competence, humor, logical reasoning, and grammar, Kruger and Dunning (1999) found that people with low skills consistently overestimated their skill levels. Kruger and Dunning (1999) note that the domains they studied share a common characteristic: Performance in these domains is not constrained by physical attributes (e.g., strength) or by mental abilities. Instead, successful performance in each domain is largely a consequence of the individual's rule-based knowledge about the domain. Therefore, a lack of skill in the domain implies simultaneously the inability to perform competently (to apply the rules) and the inability to recognize competence (to recognize when rules are violated). Diversity competence is similarly a skill area where successful performance depends largely on cognitive knowledge. Diversity competence represents a trainable skill, in which trainees can learn to diagnose diversity situations and identify appropriate responses (Gudykunst, Guzley, & Hammer, 1996; Tan & Chua, 2003; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). If the 'unskilled and unaware of it' phenomenon extends to diversity competencies, trainees with low competence levels may be unaware of their skill deficits and therefore unlikely to take advantage of voluntary opportunities to improve their skills (Yammarino & Atwater, 1993). This suggests that those individuals with high levels of diversity knowledge and skill will be more likely to volunteer for training than those with low knowledge or skill. High-skill trainees are in a better position to identify their skill deficits and recognize a need for training.

*Hypothesis 2.* Employees with high competence in the diversity domain will be more interested in voluntary training on diversity issues than low-competence employees.

Voluntary diversity training is one of many training controversies that have thus far received little direct research attention in the diversity literature (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2003). We engaged in two studies to examine how demographic variables and pre-training competence levels might impact participation in voluntary diversity training programs. In Study One, we examined how employee demographics and equal opportunity knowledge predicted interest in additional equal opportunity

training in a police constabulary. In Study Two, we examined how trainee demographics and pre-training cultural competence predicted attendance at a voluntary diversity training program in a university setting.

## Organizational Context

### Study One

This study was conducted at a UK police organization, which is one of over 40 police constabularies within the UK. Each constabulary has its own Chief Constable who reports to the home office.

The constabulary investigated in this study covered one of the largest geographic areas for a UK police force. Women police officers made up only 17 per cent of the policing work force, and only one per cent of all staff were from ethnic minority groups. At the time of the survey, the minority ethnic population within the area served by the constabulary was also very low (approximately 1.2 per cent), reflecting the constabulary's location within largely rural and agricultural counties. Although this figure was projected to change with a growing increase in immigrant workers moving to the area, ethnic minority issues were less salient within the police organization than gender issues. Gender issues were a high priority for both national and local reasons.

Nationally, there was much interest in regard to equal opportunity within the police service. In part, this reflected a long history of the non-integration of women (e.g., specialized women police departments and separate women's roles) and a growing public demand for better representation of women. The average representation of women police officers within the force as a whole was less than 20 per cent, and considerably less within some specialist departments like criminal investigation. In addition, there had been several recent high profile sexual harassment court cases which led the home office to make equal opportunity a strategic priority.

Within the constabulary, there was considerable pressure to improve equal opportunity policies and practices, particularly those relating to gender. This reflected the national agenda, but also the fact that one of the high profile harassment cases had been initiated by female police officers within the constabulary. The representation of women within the constabulary was also identified as lower than for the force as a whole. A new equal opportunity officer had been recruited who was particularly committed to improving the management of diversity within the organization. In light of a strong backlash from staff against gender-specific policies, this officer was focusing on increasing overall perceptions of fairness by improving internal appraisal and grievance procedures and by introducing specific practices to support greater diversity (e.g., equal opportunity training). The current research was part of this overall agenda, and was aimed at monitoring the impact of policies that were in place, as well as diagnosing areas in need of further improvement.

The constabulary was a training-active organization, with a moderately high level of training occurring at any particular time. Generally, training was considered to be valuable, and was widely deemed to be a benefit rather than a cost, especially since evidence of training and development was important for advancement and promotion within the organization. Our data were collected in 2000 as the constabulary was completing a first wave of mandatory equal opportunity training. Employee reactions to the mandatory training had been positive, with a very large percentage (87 per cent) of trainees describing the training as 'moderately' or 'very' useful on a three-point scale.

## Study One Method

### *Participants and procedure*

Study One used a survey methodology and participants were police officers and staff members in a police constabulary in the United Kingdom (see contextual sidebar for details). All female police officers, an equivalent sized stratified random sample of male police officers, and all female and male support staff were given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire sent through the internal mail system. A sampling procedure was used for male police officers because their numbers far outweighed any other group. To ensure a reasonable spread across the constabulary, the male police officer sample was stratified on the basis of rank (above and below sergeant) and department (criminal investigation/specialist departments and other departments). A reference group including representatives from all levels of the organization and the union oversaw the research. To encourage participation, the survey was endorsed by the Chief Constable as well as union representatives in various communications to staff. Confidentiality of responses was assured. Participants returned the surveys by mailing them direct to the researchers. 420 surveys were returned, reflecting a response rate of 47 per cent. Comparisons of sample statistics against organizational statistics suggested the responding sample was representative of the broader organization.

At the time of the survey, the constabulary was completing a wave of equal opportunity training. Every staff member was expected to participate in this training and attendance was recorded for performance appraisal purposes. Organizational records indicated that nearly 92 per cent of the staff had completed the training. The constabulary's purpose in conducting the survey was to evaluate equal opportunity policies and practices, to assess staff members' current equal opportunity competency, and to investigate staff members' interest in participating in additional, discretionary, training on equal opportunity. Our analysis focuses only on respondents who reported that they had the opportunity to participate in the first wave of mandatory training, and who had actually attended the training. However, analyses using the full sample of respondents (including those who did not have the opportunity to participate due to sickness or scheduling clashes, and those who did not attend for whatever reason) produce the same pattern of results as those reported here.

### *Variables*

#### **Training interest**

Training interest was assessed by a single item: Would you welcome the opportunity to attend (more) equal opportunity training? (0 = would not welcome, 1 = would welcome).

#### **Gender and age**

Respondents reported their gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and their age in years. Respondents also reported their race/ethnicity. However, since more than 99 per cent of the sample described themselves as white, this variable was not used in the analysis. Instead, we focus our analysis on only the white respondents.

#### **EO knowledge**

Equal opportunity (EO) knowledge was assessed by a series of eight statements describing principles of equal opportunity and the operation of these principles within the constabulary. The constabulary policy on equal opportunity encouraged the use of 'positive action' strategies (Chater & Chater, 1992) for increasing non-traditional employee participation in the labor force such as part-time work and

schedule accommodation for working parents. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that each statement was correct (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). However, because the scale was intended to measure participants' knowledge of material covered directly in the training program, and not participants' opinions, we treated the scale as a 'true or false' knowledge test, where 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses reflected the trainee's endorsement of a factual statement as 'true.' After reverse scoring appropriate items, 'Strongly agree' and 'agree' were coded 'correct' (1), and all other responses coded 'incorrect' (0). The number of 'correct' items was used as a total test score. The statements are included in Appendix. Our measure of EO knowledge is a formative measure rather than a reflective one. In a reflective measure, indicators are caused by (reflect) a latent construct; in a formative measure, individual indicators combine to form a latent construct (Bollen & Lennox, 1991; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Jarvis, 2005). Traditional internal consistency measures of reliability (e.g., coefficient alpha) are inappropriate for formative measures because each item captures a unique aspect of the knowledge domain and item pairs may have positive, negative, or no correlation. In order to ensure that our measure of EO knowledge was appropriate, we asked subject matter experts working within the constabulary to confirm that the items reflected the content of EO training and EO practices within the organization.

## Study One Results

Table 1 presents correlations among the study variables. Table 2 shows the results of a logistic regression analysis predicting training interest. Only one variable (EO knowledge) predicted a

Table 1. Correlations among study variables (Study One)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Training Interest	0.47	0.50				
2. Gender	0.54	0.50	-0.03			
3. Age	39.91	9.94	-0.01	-0.36**		
4. EO Knowledge	4.38	1.86	0.14**	0.22**	-0.24**	

Note: Training interest coded 0 = would not welcome more training, 1 = would welcome more training; Gender coded 0 = male, 1 = female.

N = 265.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Table 2. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting training interest from gender, age, and EO knowledge (Study One)

Variables	b	s.e
Gender	-0.23	0.27
Age	0.01	0.01
EO knowledge	0.28***	0.07
Model chi-square	16.70**	
Classification Accuracy	61.1%	

Note: The logistic regression predicts the likelihood that a staff member would welcome additional EO training.

N = 265.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

respondent's interest in attending additional EO training. The respondents who were most interested in further training were those with the highest levels of EO knowledge. When we divided the sample into thirds based on their EO knowledge scores, we found that only 41 per cent of those in the lowest third were interested in training. In contrast, 48 per cent of those in the middle third and 55 per cent of those in the highest third expressed an interest in more EO training.

## Organizational Context

### Study Two

This study was conducted at a large public University in the southwestern United States.

The U.S. workforce is rapidly increasing in demographic diversity. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that between 2002 and 2012, the Hispanic labor force will grow from 12.4 per cent to 14.7 per cent and the African American labor force will increase from 11.4 per cent to 12.2 per cent. The female labor force is projected to grow by 14.3 per cent, compared with 10 per cent for men. Demographic diversity is also reflected in the composition of the University's student body. Fifteen per cent of graduate students are from ethnic minority backgrounds and 17 per cent are international students.

The University is strongly committed to the promotion of diversity in all of its activities. Diversity training is part of this commitment, and is intended to provide students with the diversity skills they need to work and study effectively at the University and the diversity skills they will need later in the workforce. The business school developed and administered a diversity training program for teaching assistants in 1999. In Fall 2000, the University modified this program and made it available to research assistants in 26 departments on a voluntary basis. The research reported here was part of the Fall 2000 voluntary program.

## Study Two Method

### *Participants and procedure*

Study Two used a field study methodology. The research was conducted at a large university in the southwestern United States, using research assistants (RAs) in 26 departments as trainees (see contextual sidebar for details). 300 RAs, both new and continuing, were sent a pre-training survey and invited to attend a half-day diversity training session during the middle of the fall semester—after the university's midterm period but several weeks before end-of-semester assignment due dates and final exams. The survey was accompanied by a letter from the associate dean of the Graduate College strongly encouraging the RAs to participate in the training. The letter assigned the RA to a particular training session but provided contact information if the RA needed to reschedule. All rescheduling requests were accommodated by the researchers. 112 surveys were returned, indicating a response rate

of 37 per cent. Comparisons of the demographics of the survey sample against the original population of 300 RAs suggested the sample was representative of the population in terms of gender, but contained a higher proportion of white RAs (0.60) than the population (0.49,  $p < 0.05$ ). The final training sample consisted of 53 trainees. The trained sample did not differ significantly from the population on either gender or racioethnicity.

### **Training program content**

Training was conducted in small groups, included a mix of awareness and skill components, and used a variety of teaching techniques, including exercises, small group activities, large group discussions, and brief lectures. The four-hour training program was developed from materials contained in the training manual, 'Developing diversity training for the workplace: A guide for trainers,' written by the National MultiCultural Institute (NMCI) located in Washington D.C. NMCI provides individual and organizational change programs, produces resource materials for trainers, and sponsors conferences on diversity issues. Before designing our training program, one of the researchers had attended a train-the-trainer workshop offered by NMCI. The researchers in turn trained five trainers from the University's Graduate College staff and counseling psychology graduate program to conduct the training sessions.

### *Variables*

#### **Training attendance**

Training attendance was tracked by the trainers (0 = did not attend, 1 = attended).

#### **Gender and racioethnicity**

The Graduate College training office provided data on the racioethnicity and gender of participants. Gender was coded 0 = male, 1 = female. Racioethnicity was coded 0 = white, 1 = non-white.

#### **Cultural competence**

Behavioral skills in managing and responding to diversity were measured by an adaptation of the Instructor Cultural Competence Questionnaire (ICCQ; Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2002), an instrument that assesses the behavioral or skill-based component of diversity learning. The ICCQ is an open-ended situational questionnaire that presents a series of classroom diversity incidents to respondents, who are asked to explain what they would do in each situation. Since the RAs in this study did not have direct teaching responsibilities, the incidents in the ICCQ were modified to take place in settings outside the classroom (e.g., in a department general office, on a professor's research team). In these incidents the respondent had no formal authority to produce change but had the opportunity to behave as an 'active bystander' in response to a diversity challenge (Jackson, 2006; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Other research using this modified version of the ICCQ demonstrates that cultural competence scores are positively correlated with other diversity training outcomes including diversity attitudes and diversity knowledge (Roberson et al., in press).

The scoring system for the ICCQ is based on Bennett's (1993) model of intercultural competence. Bennett (1993) described six developmental stages ranging from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism as a person develops greater cultural awareness and competence. Two undergraduate coders were taught Bennett's (1993) cultural competence model and given scoring guidelines with examples of behavior at each stage. The six stages were collapsed to three to simplify the coding task. The coders first applied the scoring guidelines to previously-coded responses from an earlier study. After coding the responses



independently, they discussed their answers and received feedback from one of the researchers. This process continued until the coders were consistently meeting a criterion of 0.70 reliability based on their independent coding. The coders then worked independently to score each of the respondents' answers to the current study's four vignettes. Scores for the four vignettes were averaged to obtain a measure of each participant's Cultural Competence (interrater reliability (intraclass correlation) = 0.76). This level of reliability is slightly higher than reliabilities reported in other research using the original ICCQ (Roberson et al., 2001: 0.71; Roberson et al., 2002: 0.75 (pretest) and 0.71 (posttest)).

## Study Two Results

Table 3 presents correlations among the study variables. Table 4 shows the results of a logistic regression analysis predicting training attendance. Only one of the antecedent variables (pre-training cultural competence) predicted training attendance. The trainees who were most likely to attend the training were those with the highest pre-training cultural competence levels. When we divided the pre-training sample into thirds based on their pre-training cultural competence scores, we found that only 23.7 per cent of those in the lowest third attended training. In contrast, 51.4 per cent of those in the middle third and 70.3 per cent of those in the highest third attended training.

Table 3. Correlations among study variables (Study Two)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Training attendance	0.48	0.50				
2. Gender	0.46	0.55	0.01			
3. Racioethnicity	0.40	0.49	0.17	-0.03		
4. Cultural competence	1.32	0.36	0.36**	0.08	-0.01	

*Note:* Training attendance coded 0 = did not attend, 1 = attended; Gender coded 0 = male, 1 = female; Racioethnicity coded 0 = white, 1 = non-white.

N = 110.

$p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Table 4. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting training attendance from gender, racioethnicity, and pre-training cultural competence (Study Two)

Variables	b	s.e
Gender	-0.13	0.38
Racioethnicity	0.28	0.25
Cultural competence	2.68**	0.78
Model chi-square	17.05**	
Classification accuracy	64.5%	

*Note:* The logistic regression predicts the likelihood that an RA will attend training.

N = 110.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

## Discussion

Organizational diversity training may be implemented with many goals in mind—to increase trainee knowledge about diversity, to change trainee attitudes toward diversity, or to improve trainee diversity skills and behavior. The available research suggests that diversity training can have positive effects on trainee knowledge about diversity and trainee diversity skills (see Kulik & Roberson, in press, for a review). However, these positive effects can only be realized in voluntary diversity training initiatives if the training attracts the people most in need of the training. We examined training attraction effects in two different organizational contexts. In Study One, we examined employee interest in attending a voluntary equal opportunity training session following participation in a mandatory one. In this study, the original training operated as an information dissemination mechanism, designed to educate staff about the organization's equal opportunity procedures and policies. In Study Two, we examined graduate research assistants' participation in voluntary diversity training. In this study, the training was intended to improve the RAs' diversity skills. We found parallel effects in the two studies.

First, trainee demographics had non-significant effects on training interest and training participation. In Study One, women and older employees expressed as much interest in equal opportunity training as men and younger employees. In Study Two, whites and men were as likely to voluntarily attend training as non-whites and women. We had anticipated a demographic effect based on previous research suggesting that non-traditional employees are, in general, more supportive of diversity initiatives than members of the dominant demographic group (Alderfer et al., 1992; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Mor-Barak et al., 1998). We expected that women, non-whites, and older workers in the organizational contexts studied here would be more enthusiastic about voluntary diversity training, because they would perceive the training as offering more personal benefit (Noe, 1986, 1999). In fact, traditional and non-traditional employees embraced (and avoided) training to the same degree. The lack of effects for trainee demographics in both contexts is heartening, since they indicate that members of the dominant group are no more likely to avoid diversity training opportunities than the non-traditional employees who might directly benefit from diversity initiatives.

Second, pre-training competency had a significant effect on training interest and training participation. In Study One, employees with greater EO knowledge expressed more interest in voluntary equal opportunity training than employees with less EO knowledge. In Study Two, employees with higher diversity skills were more likely to attend voluntary training than employees with lower diversity skills. We had anticipated this competency effect based on the findings of Kruger and Dunning (1999) who demonstrated that individuals who lack skills in a given domain frequently lack the skills needed to assess competence in that same domain. Individuals with higher competence levels in a given domain also have developed skills needed to recognize good performance and to identify skill deficits. Therefore, high-competence individuals are more likely to take advantage of opportunities that will enable them to continue to hone their skills and correct deficits.

### *Implications for organizations*

Our research presents a 'good news, bad news' picture for organizations relying on voluntary diversity training programs. On the positive side, our results suggest that organizations offering voluntary diversity training are likely to recruit a demographically diverse mix of trainees. Trainee diversity is frequently recommended in the diversity training literature (e.g., Ellis & Sonnenfeld, 1994; Kirkland & Regan, 1997) and these recommendations have sometimes prompted well-intentioned efforts to monitor and 'adjust' the demographic mix of organizational training groups (Caudron & Hayes, 1997;

Markels, 1997). Our research suggests that this kind of micro-management of demographic representation in voluntary diversity training is probably unnecessary. The ability of a voluntary diversity training program to attract people from different demographic groups offers a distinct advantage to organizations. Demographics are associated with the size and scope of employees' social networks (Ibarra, 1993, 1995); the broader the demographic representation in the training group, the more social networks the organizational training can influence, and the greater the eventual diffusion of training outcomes through the organization.

Unfortunately, there is also a negative side to our results. Voluntary diversity training is most likely to attract the trainees who have the least need of training. Repeated or refresher training is associated with the maintenance of complex skills (Farr, 1987; Ginzburg & Dar-El, 2000), and when high-skill employees take advantage of training opportunities they will continue to develop and maintain their diversity skills. Voluntary training is likely to miss the employees with low skill competencies—and it is these individuals who are likely to do the most harm in damaging the organization's diversity climate. In the long run, organizations that rely exclusively on voluntary skill training are likely to develop a two-tier workforce, with some employees exhibiting extremely high competence levels in contrast to a low competency tier. The high competence individuals may become diversity champions in the organizations and act as role models for other organizational members (Cross, 2000). However, their 'good works' may be counterbalanced by the low competence employees who fail to develop even moderate skill levels. These low skill employees are unable to evaluate competence in the diversity domain—their own or anyone else's (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Therefore, their own behavior will continue to display diversity 'errors' and they will not be able to provide effective coaching to peers or subordinates with respect to diversity.

Can an organization afford to miss training their low-skill employees? The answer to this question probably depends on two elements of a pre-training needs assessment (Roberson et al., 2003). First, exactly how low is the low end of the skill continuum in the organization? While there is no absolute benchmark, an organization cannot afford to have low-skill employees putting it at risk of employee complaints or discrimination lawsuits. This suggests that the pre-training needs assessment should specify the minimal skills required for compliance with local equal opportunity and civil rights legislation—and ensure that employees failing to meet this criterion do not slip through the training 'net.' This is especially important when the low-skill employees have supervisory responsibilities or occupy positions where diversity incompetence might have particularly large consequences for the organization (e.g., front-line sales employees who regularly interact with diverse customers). Second, what are the organization's diversity goals? Some organizations are motivated to adopt diversity training to minimize their legal liability (Langevoort, 2004; Sturm, 2001), and these organizations may be satisfied with minimal employee skills that avoid the most problematic forms of discriminatory behavior. However, organizations wishing to capitalize on diversity's benefits on creativity and innovation need employees with more finely-honed diversity skills and a more proactive approach to diversity management.

Regardless of where they place the 'minimally acceptable' diversity skill criterion, organizations need to consider how they will attract low skill employees to participate in voluntary diversity training efforts. One possibility might be to make prospective trainees aware of their skill deficits—perhaps by requiring a skills pretest and giving trainees direct (but confidential) access to their pre-training scores. Without the metacognitive skills needed to evaluate their own and other people's performance, low skill employees are unable to engage in the informal social comparison processes that high skill employees use to assess their relative competence levels (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). As a result, 'low skill and unaware' employees may be more dependent on objective benchmarking data provided directly by the organization (Silverman, Pogson, & Cober, 2005). However, learning that one has low diversity skills may be very threatening to an employee's self-concept, and the way in which this feedback is

communicated may make the employee more or less open to training. DeNisi and Kluger (2000) suggest that the most effective feedback interventions focus the attention at the task level, provide specific recommendations for improvement, and come from a trusted and knowledgeable source. These feedback elements can keep the employee from generating the negative emotions (e.g., disappointment or despair) that would de-motivate improvement efforts. Therefore, the feedback should emphasize how developing particular skills (in this case, a diversity skill set) will help the employee to be a better performer rather than describing the employees as biased or insensitive.

Another possible strategy for attracting employees to voluntary diversity training is to highlight the personal value of the training by offering incentives for participation—for example, recognizing and rewarding training participation as part of performance reviews or evaluations of managerial potential. These incentives run the risk of transforming voluntary training programs into training programs that might be perceived as mandated or even coercive by employees. Therefore, it is important to maintain employee freedom in choosing among alternative training programs or developmental opportunities that relate to the same skill domain. Employee choice enhances trainee perceptions that the training is appropriate for their needs and trainee commitment to the training (Hicks & Klimoski, 1987). Additionally, minor variations in advertising may affect employee interest in diversity training. Research exploring ‘framing’ effects has found that individuals reacted most positively to training descriptions with a traditional ‘Diversity Training’ title and a broad focus spanning a large number of diversity dimensions (Holladay, Knight, Paige, & Quiñones, 2003). This stream of research should be extended to examine how framing affects actual participation rates.

Finally, another strategy for exposing low skill employees to diversity issues might be to ‘yoke’ diversity training with other organizational training efforts. If low skill employees are not interested in general diversity training, they may be attracted to training efforts that address particular diversity skills (e.g., training that develops interviewing skills, performance development skills, or conflict management skills within a diverse context). All of these strategies are designed to get the low skill trainee through the diversity training door. In the training program, the information provided can simultaneously address the diversity skill deficit and develop the metacognitive skills the employee needs to recognize situations in which he or she is performing poorly (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Our results demonstrating the key role of competency in determining interest and participation in diversity training may suggest another, less obvious, avenue for attracting employees to voluntary training. This avenue requires that organizations reflect on the factors that lead to employee competency in the first place. Employee knowledge and skills in a given domain, and employee self-efficacy for acquiring knowledge and skills in that domain, are likely to be highly related. Bandura and Schunk (1981) argued that when individuals experience a sense of self-efficacy in a situation, they are more likely to develop an interest in the activity than are those who fail to develop such efficacy. Therefore, organizations need to consider how they can develop employee interest in diversity—and *simultaneously* encourage a sense of diversity self-efficacy in employees.

The training literature suggests that self-efficacy can be enhanced through mastery experiences, modeling, and persuasion (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Research to date has focused on developing self-efficacy within a particular training program, but researchers (e.g., Mathieu, Martineau, & Tannenbaum, 1993) have speculated that there may be spillover effects across related training courses that over time contribute to ‘continuous learning’ processes within organizations. That is, an early training experience that enhances employee self-efficacy for learning a particular skill set might motivate the employee to seek out other developmental opportunities in the same skill domain. Organizational diversity training is rarely designed or delivered as a multistep progression (Kulik & Roberson, in press). However, diversity training might be particularly beneficial if self-efficacy development strategies were incorporated into early mandatory training efforts to increase interest and ready employees to take advantage of related, voluntary, training initiatives. Voluntary training

programs are then more likely to be perceived as advanced skill development rather than remedial training, evoking more positive employee reactions (Quiñones, 1995).

The challenges associated with attracting employees to voluntary training programs are not limited to diversity training efforts. Similar challenges might be associated with career management training, safety training, ethics training—any domain in which an organization is not legally mandated to train employees but might nonetheless benefit if employees participated in training. Requiring participation in training programs sends a clear and direct signal to employees that training is important (Mathieu & Martineau, 1997). However, the organizational value of voluntary training can be signaled indirectly, by ensuring that organizational policies and supervisory practices establish a climate in which certain behaviors and skills are consistently rewarded and supported (Zohar & Luria, 2004; Zohar & Luria, 2005). Organizational climate is usually examined for its post-training impact on transfer of trained skills to on-the-job behavior (e.g., Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995), but climate may be equally important in influencing trainee motivation to participate in voluntary training programs. Employees are more likely to take advantage of voluntary training opportunities if they work in organizational contexts that recognize and reward employees for training participation.

### *Limitations and recommendations for future research*

Our research displays several strengths. Most notably, we were able to demonstrate parallel effects using two distinct methodologies in two different organizational and cultural contexts. However, several important limitations should be acknowledged, and these limitations provide directions for future research.

Our review of the literature suggested that employee demographics and pre-training skill levels would influence trainees' perceptions of the personal value of training and their perceived need for training. However, these intervening motivational variables were not measured directly. Future research should assess these mediating variables and contrast them with alternative mediators that might further our theoretical understanding of the decision to participate in voluntary diversity training.

For example, based on Kruger and Dunning (1999), we suggested that low skill employees were unaware of their low skills and therefore did not perceive a need to participate in diversity training. However, it is also possible that low skill employees *are* aware of their skill levels but have low self-efficacy for change (Bandura, 1977; Combs, 2002). Distinguishing between these causes is important, because they suggest different strategies for attracting low skill employees to voluntary training. If low-skill employees are unaware of their skill deficits, but have high-self-efficacy for change, pre-training assessments that highlight their diversity management errors are most likely to motivate their interest in training. However, if low-skill employees are being held back by low self-efficacy, providing 'mastery experiences' that identify their existing skills, capabilities, and diversity management successes may be more effective (Combs, 2002).

Further, even if low skill employees are aware of their need for training *and* experience high self-efficacy for their ability to change, they may be skeptical about the value of an organizational training program in addressing their skill deficits. This skepticism may reflect trainee cynicism about organizational change efforts in general (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998), or about diversity training in particular. Diversity training may be perceived as too 'touchy feely' to generate substantial outcomes in skill levels. Or the diversity training may be perceived as 'window dressing' in a diversity-insensitive organization and the trainee may anticipate few rewards for improving his or her diversity skills.

Future research should directly examine the mediational mechanisms that attract employees to voluntary training. These mechanisms may represent competing hypotheses about the reasons low competency employees fail to take advantage of voluntary training opportunities, but they may also

operate in tandem. Noe (1986, 1999), for example, has suggested that trainee perceptions of the *need* for training and perceptions of the *value* of training have distinct motivational effects. Attracting low competency employees to diversity training may require a multi-pronged strategy that improves employee awareness and self-efficacy at the individual level, and improves the reputation of diversity training at the organizational level.

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## Author biographies

**Carol T. Kulik** is a research professor in human resource management at the University of South Australia. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on how human resource management practices can be used to manage demographic diversity and promote fairness in organizations.

**Molly B. Pepper** is an assistant professor of management in the Jepson School of Business at Gonzaga University. She received her Ph.D. from Arizona State University. Her research interests include mentoring, diversity and computer-mediated communication.

**Loriann Roberson** is a professor of psychology and education in the social-organizational psychology program at Teachers College, Columbia University. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. Her current research interests focus on workforce diversity and diversity interventions in organizations.

**Sharon K. Parker** is a research professor at the Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield, UK, where she also earned her Ph.D. Her research focuses on how work structures and practices, particularly job design, affect employees' well-being, performance, and development. Current interests focus on how employee proactivity is enhanced and inhibited within the work place.

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## Appendix: Study One Equal Opportunity Knowledge Scale

Part-time working should be discouraged by senior managers to avoid the organizational problems it might create (reverse-scored).

Women should not be given any special treatment just because they have just returned to work after having a child (reverse-scored).

Women should be left alone to get on with their career, without any special consideration (reverse-scored).

Employees who work part-time are usually just as committed to their work as those who work full-time. 'Equal opportunities' means that everyone who applies for a job should be interviewed (reverse-scored).

Advertising for a woman to fill a post, even if a female is actually required for the job, goes against equal opportunities (reverse-scored).

(Locality name) police should do more to make it possible for women to combine a career with having children

If there's a choice, it's economically more sensible to choose a man for a job rather than a woman (reverse-scored)