“WE ARE ALWAYS AT CHOICE": A CRITICAL HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE ON COACHING STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE LEADERS

by

RACHEL WATTS

(Under the Direction of Laura L. Bierema)

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand how coaching is used to develop and enhance leaders’ ability to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in organizations, specifically in higher education spaces. The research questions that guided the study include: 1.) What approaches do coaches use when developing more inclusive leaders in higher education? and 2.) What do coaches say about the challenges and benefits of DEIB coaching for leaders?

This qualitative research study used a semi-structured interview protocol with nine participant coaches who engaged in leadership coaching, specifically for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in higher education. The participants represented a mix of white and Black men and women, who ranged in age from 40 – 70 years and had a wide range of experience with coaching. The interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using a thematic comparative analysis method to understand how coaching was used with leaders to develop more inclusive leaders. From the data, I identified ten themes that yielded insights into the skills and approaches coaches used in developing

more inclusive leaders and what coaches say are the challenges and benefits of using coaching to develop DEIB competencies and readiness in leaders.

From the study's findings, I derived two significant conclusions about how coaching is used for DEIB to develop more inclusive leaders. First, coaches incorporate a more critical and dynamic approach to their practice to prepare leaders to lead DEIB efforts in their organizations. Within this dynamic approach, there are four critical components to help navigate success with DEIB coaching. The second conclusion is that ultimately, “we are always at choice”: where coaches attend to their personal biases and limitations while fostering resilience and their own safety through self-coaching practices. By using critical HRD as a conceptual theoretical framework, I proposed a Coaching for Inclusive Leadership Critical Component model.

INDEX WORDS: critical Human Resource Development, coaching, leadership development, adult learning, inclusive leadership

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DEDICATION

For Melanie. Thank you for all your love and support. And to those doing the challenging DEIB work like the participants in this study, fighting the good fight to change the world for the better, thank you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, organizational leaders in the United States were confronted with a racial reckoning. The murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery and the police break-in and shooting that led to the death of Breonna Taylor were documented and uploaded to social media and subsequently broadcast to the masses. The public reaction to these offenses and to other events, such as the headlines of stories of sexual abuse in the television and movie industries, led to public outrage. The accompanying insights were instrumental in inspiring recent social movements—Black Lives Matter, Say Her Name, and the #MeToo Movement. Additionally, this collective awareness led to those demands for leaders to confront social injustices and become more committed to social justice, increasing and improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) for historically excluded people in all areas of society, including the workplace.

Many companies released public statements showing their support and promising to increase their DEIB efforts, especially through training and professional development (Sterbenk et al., 2022). During the first year since the demand for more awareness around diversity and equity, organizations have increased their DEIB training budgets by an average of 26% (United Minds, 2021), over the $8 billion a year spent on diversity training reported previously (Kirkland & Bohnet, 2017). There has also been a staggering increase in DEIB-specific training participation, with some offerings seeing over 1000% growth rate (Kidwai, 2020). However, despite the deeper investment in DEIB training,

many employees are still reporting discrimination, harassment, or microaggressions at work (United Minds, 2021). A Gallup study found that one in four Black and Hispanic workers experienced discrimination at work (Lloyd, 2021). The data indicate that organizational leaders are still not equipped to adequately address systemic challenges in meaningful ways.

What is possibly worse is that just a few years after the demand for DEIB and an increased effort to confront injustices, organizations experienced backlash and a wave of anti-DEI rhetoric, much of it stemming from politics and thus sinking support for DEIB initiatives. There were severe rollbacks of DEIB gains through political pressure and legislation. In 2023, the Supreme Court of the United States, for example, overturned affirmative action, a tool in place to help enhance diversity and increase equal opportunities for communities of color. During the first few weeks in office, the newly elected President of the United States in 2025 issued executive orders to end federal DEIB programs and the use of federal dollars to pay for diversity training. These rollbacks posed a significant challenge to ensuring DEIB in organizations, and organizational leaders are ill-equipped to respond to or challenge these directives to protect DEIB progress. Indeed, universities have been one of the main organizational targets of attacks by far-right leaders and voters (Conway, 2022; Taylor et al., 2020), especially in reacting to universities' commitment to advancing DEIB.

Higher Education

Institutes of higher education in the United States have long been committed to critical thinking, building the capacity for reason, encouraging difficult discourse, and engaging in dissent (Conway, 2022). Moreover, they provide spaces where freedom of

inquiry, thought, and expression are encouraged and valued. This perception and intent of higher education are complicated, considering its fraught history with segregation and exclusivity. Higher education institutions have made considerable strides over time, although incompletely, in transforming their policies to address or mitigate inequities and increase access to education for historically marginalized communities. This focus also included a commitment to DEIB where they have increasingly initiated formal initiatives as a response to political and societal pressures to support students from historically underserved populations and enhance campus diversity (Patton et al., 2019). This commitment is also evidenced through the creation of offices, centers, and departments on campuses dedicated to advancing DEIB. For example, in 2019, Emory University hired its first chief diversity officer to lead efforts to create a strategy focusing on equity and inclusion efforts (Emory University, 2019). Training and development for faculty and staff members, such as safe space and implicit bias training—some mandated or part of compliance—were also part of these efforts. Yet, despite these efforts, most senior leadership positions remain filled by those who identify as white and men. Moreover, research focused on the lived experiences of faculty and staff identifying with under-represented groups had reported that those groups had experienced feelings of being "undervalued, [and] perceived challenges to one's credentials and intellect, [and] reported biases in the hiring process" (Longman et al., 2021, p. 266). These experiences underscore how, even after receiving DEIB training, leaders may still lack the skills and capacity to be more inclusive, recognize and mitigate unconscious bias, create a more engaging workplace culture, and drive meaningful systemic changes.

The Problem with DEIB Training

DEIB training, in general, has been criticized for being too cursory or failing to drive behavioral changes. Research shows that basic DEIB training, or even mandated training, usually the only type offered, does not equip leaders with the ability to hold frank conversations about racism, sexism, accountability, or change. Other criticisms point out that the training courses are often too brief and are one-and-done courses usually offered as special topics training. When development opportunities on bias, microaggressions, and non-discriminatory hiring practices are labeled as special-topic DEIB training, these opportunities can become marginalized and avoided (Bethea, 2020). Additionally, research has shown that any positive effects of diversity and inclusion training rarely last after one training session (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Incorporating DEIB learning into leadership training and development programs and recategorizing DEIB as necessary leadership competencies—which they are— can normalize these DEIB objectives. Moreover, including DEIB learning objectives and competencies, such as those in leader development programs, would move them beyond one-off training interactions. Therefore, strategizing more sustainable options that use ongoing discussions and processes is necessary and could potentially assist in better learning and transformational learning to develop more inclusive leaders. One such strategy to use in developing more inclusive leaders is coaching.

Coaching is an ongoing, strategic process focusing on equipping people with knowledge, tools, and opportunities to improve. Additionally, the foundation of coaching "promotes inquiry, challeng[es] thinking patterns, and creates new ways of thinking, being, and acting" (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018, p. 4). Coaching can provide an opportunity for

an experiential, reflective, and individualized approach by facilitating real-world application and inquiry into experiences to challenge mindsets and behaviors (Prime et al., 2021) that can hinder meaningful systemic change. Through this process, coaching as part of leader development has the potential to create more inclusive leaders by helping them move from safety to bravery in thinking, doing, and being when it comes to creating meaningful change around DEIB matters.

Coaching

Coaching has its roots in different disciplines, including business, psychology, sports, philosophy, and sociology; therefore, there is no singular theoretical underpinning or definition. Instead, there is a consistent overlap of understanding, methods, and conceptualizations of coaching. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) defined coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (ICF, 2008). Day’s (2000) definition of coaching expanded this process to incorporate goal-oriented forms of interactions in a collaborative process and described coaching as involving "practical, goal-focused forms of one-on-one learning and behavioral change" (p. 590). Boysen-Rotelli’s (2018) definition is based on a more transformative understanding where she posited that the foundation of coaching “promotes inquiry, challeng[es] thinking patterns, and creates new ways of thinking, being, and acting” (p. 4). Askew and Carnell (2011) also viewed coaching as more learning-centered, where coachees are guided to “identify their own actions for change as a result of their learning” (p. 3). While accomplishing goals and reaching individual potential are important benefits of coaching, the learning gained, reflection, interrogating mindsets, and entering new ways of being are all equally

as important, especially when developing more inclusive leaders to challenge their own deeply held beliefs, assumptions, and biases that can prevent authentic DEIB efforts.

Indeed, there can be advantages to not having a singular definition of coaching as it can allow for alternative concepts and understandings and encourage innovation and breakthroughs. However, coaching can be considered specific to an intentional process, practice, and purpose. Many researchers and practitioners have agreed that it is important to examine and understand what the coach *does* and what their role *is* with coachees or clients (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018; Mackie, 2014; Theeboom et al., 2014). Therefore, coaching should be learning-centered and an ongoing process rather than a one-and-done event to be most effective. The most enticing benefit of coaching as a part of leadership development lies in the fact that coaching is a process involving a coach asking powerful, critical questions, enabling the coachee to develop more effective self-awareness, feel empowered, and motivated for change. Bierema (2019) described coaching as an inquiry-centered process, including actions toward changing clients' thoughts and actions through learning and change. Therefore, coaching can provide an opportunity for an experiential approach by facilitating real-world application and inquiry into experiences to challenge thinking patterns and behaviors (Prime et al., 2021) that can hinder meaningful systemic change.

Leadership and Inclusive Leadership Development

There are many different and collective perspectives of leadership, which continue to evolve. Although many attempts have been made to try to define leadership, one common definition simply does not exist. In fact, Bennis (1985) claimed there are over 850 academic definitions of leadership. However, the complexity and evolution of

leadership studies make it difficult to construct a single definition or come to a consensus about the meaning of leadership. A basic, traditional perspective of leadership often involves a positional role where an individual (the leader) is placed in charge of a team of people (followers), setting direction and providing support (Day & Harrison, 2007; Gronn, 2002). This leader then leverages their influence in relationships. Northouse (2016) described leadership as a process involving the influence of individuals within group relationships to achieve goals. Indeed, other more complex and advanced perspectives of leadership take the form of a shared process containing interdependencies among individuals and teams working collectively across the organization, making relationships important to leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007; Northouse, 2016; O'Connor & Quinn, 2004). Therefore, definitions of leadership can take on the meaning of single identity or collective work, going beyond the traditional single-leader perspective. A combination of both perspectives is needed, I argue, as focusing on single-leader meanings of leadership can overlook the multi-level and contextual relationship and influences key to leadership, while focusing singularly on collective leadership can overlook the individual needs and nuances of leading and influencing others, such as what skills and competencies are needed.

Ultimately, leadership can and does take on multiple meanings that have changed, depending on different contexts and people involved (Day & Harrison, 2007). Holding this view can better prepare human resource development researchers and practitioners to uncover gaps and inconsistencies in leadership research and to think more critically about who is included and excluded in leadership research. Indeed, holding this view of leadership also helps us approach the theory, research, and practice of leadership

development with an open, critical, and curious mindset. Discussing the concept of leadership is important because, ultimately, how we define leadership, or rather how we perceive leadership, can influence our approach to developing leaders and thinking of leadership development. At any rate, what is most important to note is that leadership is ultimately a social process that involves influence, is relational and shares some common goals (Northouse, 2019).

Leadership Development

The leader and leadership development field has been a burgeoning area of scholarly theory and research, coming into its own with many theoretical and practical advances emerging over the last few decades (Day, 2000; Day et al., 2014; Fleenor et al., 2014; Vogel et al., 2021). Leadership development is a relatively new branch of theory and research, especially compared to leadership studies which spans over a century. Although rooted in leadership theory, leadership development is different from its theories, research, and practices. Leadership development requires a more complex understanding than merely choosing a leadership theory and then applying the behaviors from that theory to a training program. Leadership development also requires a keen understanding of adult learning and development processes. According to Day (2014), leadership development tends to move away from leadership studies and more toward a focus on developmental processes, such as intrapersonal and interpersonal processes, and how these developmental processes and needs can change over time for individual leaders and the leadership process.

Even though there are distinct differences between leader development and leadership development, Day and Harrison (2007) argued that the best approach to

developing leaders and leadership is to link them together by using development practices focusing on the intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies and development in collective and relational approaches to leadership. There seems to be a critical need to consider both leader and leadership development, with practices and research that connect the differences in individual development needs (knowledge, skills, abilities) with relational and collective development across all organizational levels (Day & Harrison, 2007; Vogel et al., 2021; Yeager & Callahan, 2016). Therefore, it may be more effective to bridge both leader development and leadership development, so I will broadly define leadership development to include leader development throughout this study.

Inclusive Leadership

While there are many studies and theories on leadership and leadership development, literature on inclusive leadership has only recently received attention (Booysen, 2014; Ferdman et al., 2020; Shore & Chung, 2022). Defining what inclusive leadership means and what an inclusive leader does can be difficult. How we experience and perceive inclusion may differ depending on myriad contexts, yet it is important to continue to be critical and explore these many contexts as researchers and practitioners of coaching and leadership development. Ferdman (2014) defined inclusion as involving "how well organizations and their members fully connect with, engage, and utilize people across all types of differences. . . . the core of inclusion is how people experience it" (p. 4). Additionally, Canlas and Williams (2022) expanded this understanding of inclusion to include how individuals perceive they are valued and respected members in their work groups or rather have a sense of belongingness.

While how inclusion operates and is experienced is not always clear, I argue that leadership is key in fostering organizations to become more inclusive and aware of oppressive systems. Additionally, leaders may have the capacity to make needed changes. Leaders play a pivotal and influential role in transformational organizational change. To help organizations be more inclusive, leaders must influence and serve as role models in how people connect with and engage with others across all types of differences. Moreover, how people experience inclusion in the workplace is often impacted by the organization's culture, which leadership behaviors can also influence. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) conducted one of the first empirical studies examining the construct of leader inclusiveness and the effect of professional status on psychological safety in healthcare teams. They defined leader inclusiveness as "words and deeds exhibited by leaders that invite and appreciate others' contributions" (p. 941). Leadership behaviors influencing a culture of inclusion include the ability to facilitate employees feeling part of the group while retaining their sense of uniqueness (Murrell et al., 2021; Shore et al., 2018). Additionally, Simmons and Yawson (2022) pointed out that inclusive leaders have the ability to recognize and work towards eliminating the barriers—including implicit and explicit barriers— preventing full participation and contribution of the workforce. Inclusive leaders must also develop an awareness of how doing these things impacts motivation, engagement, and cooperation (Peterson et al., 2020). There should also be awareness of how their influence and ability can ensure equitable access to knowledge and resources. Ultimately, leaders need to have the competencies, knowledge, and mindset to lead more inclusively and understand DEIB efforts and their impact on the organization. Inclusive leadership development, therefore, "should incorporate the

development of knowing, doing, and being; it should not be seen as a choice of competencies versus knowledge versus mindset, but rather be focused on all three" (Booysen, 2014, p. 302), where these are viewed as strategic learning objectives. Furthermore, human resources development researchers and practitioners can take a more critical approach in inclusive leadership development that accounts for how inclusive leaders are empowered to make or influence change in addition to these three.

Critical HRD

How leaders respond to DEIB that impacts organizations also challenges human resource development (HRD) researchers and practitioners to critically (re)examine how future and current leaders are developed to lead in more inclusive ways. One integral component of HRD is leaders' training, education, and development. In other words, leadership development is a central undertaking of HRD research and practice (Harris & Leberman, 2012; Hornsby et al., 2012; Hughes, 2018; Kuchinke et al., 2018; Scott, 2017; Sims et al., 2021). However, researchers of critical HRD have pointed out the gendered and masculinist history of HRD (Bierema, 2009; Collins, 2012; Storberg-Walker & Bierema, 2008) and its hesitation to cover or research critical topics addressing historically excluded and underrepresented identities (Bierema, 2009; Bierema & Cseh, 2003; Hughes, 2018; Santamaria, et al., 2022). For example, Collins (2012) pointed out that "lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity has not been addressed in the HRD leadership literature" (p. 349). Additionally, when looking at the current and trending research on leadership development, Vogel et al. (2021) found that critical approaches to leadership development are minimal. Therefore, this lack highlights a serious gap between DEIB education, critical perspectives in coaching and leadership development

programs, where researchers and practitioners remain uncritical, and DEIB is seen only as a peripheral, one-and-done offering to core leadership development programs.

A call for HRD to take a more critical and inclusive perspective in research and practice is not new and has been made at least since the early 2000s. Bierema and Cseh's (2003) review of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) conference proceedings between 1996 and 2000 showed that research had given little attention to social issues or even to advocating for social change. Bierema and Cseh (2003) argued that HRD does not generally concern itself with systemic DEIB issues (p. 5). Instead, HRD research and practices maintain a focus on status quo perspectives of performance and learning without critically questioning assumptions and assessing issues of racism, sexism, and how power and power relations perpetuate these issues. Ultimately, Bierema and Cseh (2003) called for a more critical perspective in HRD research and practice to address these issues, along with critically examining how HRD itself reinforces power relations and who ultimately benefits from HRD research, especially what is and is not being researched or discussed. While not exactly defining a critical HRD, Bierema and Cseh (2003) defined the feminist framework used in the research that informs proposed critical strategies for HRD research. This framework included reflexivity, de-naturalization, and anti-performativity (p. 139).

Building on Bierema and Cseh's (2003) work and using a Critical Management Studies (CMS) lens, Fenwick (2004) argued that "the conditions appear to be fertile for encouraging a stream of critical HRD" (p. 195) as the established HR field started a turn toward more robust theories and research. Since Bierema and Cseh (2003) and Fenwick (2004; 2005), others have added to the growing body of critical HRD literature (see

Bierema, 2009; Callahan, 2007; Collins, 2012; Collins & Callahan, 2023; Kwon & Archer, 2025; Rocco, et al., 2018; Sambrook, 2004; Santamaria, et al., 2022; Trehan, 2004; Trehan & Rigg, 2011), grounding conceptual frameworks, approaches, and research on critical theories and maintaining the call for HRD to continue being critical of itself and practices. This body of critical HRD work continues to grow, as well as the critiques and conceptualizations of how critical HRD is understood.

Statement of the Problem

The racial reckoning and social protests for equity in 2020 and 2021 have signaled that organizations, such as institutes of higher education, should meet changes in connecting to the world and the demands for more social justice and inclusion. To stay relevant in a changing, volatile environment, organizations are becoming more aware of and acknowledging the diversity of their ways of knowing, being, and doing and how this diversity greatly impacts the success of the organization. Such a shift means that higher education organizations, and HRD practitioners, are rethinking how they develop future and current leaders in a more inclusive way to stay relevant and incorporating coaching to move towards developing more inclusive leaders.

While the research and literature concerning leadership development and coaching are vast, there is a gap. What is missing is the critical perspective of how coaching is used in leadership development to advance and develop more inclusive leaders. Likewise, even though much research has examined the efficacy of using coaching as a part of leadership development, none to date has explored how coaching was used in leadership development specifically to help leaders overcome the barriers to making impactful, systemic changes towards DEIB efforts. Therefore, how coaching is

used in leadership development to help increase DEIB competencies and capacity in leaders is a ripe area for study. Given the rapid shift from increased demand for DEIB initiatives to their major rollback of progress and even elimination within a few years, the perspective of those engaged in DEIB coaching is especially important.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to understand how coaching is used to develop and enhance leaders' ability to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in organizations, specifically in higher education spaces. The research questions that guided the study included:

1. What approaches do coaches use when developing more inclusive leaders in higher education?
2. What do coaches say about the challenges and benefits of DEIB coaching for leaders?

Significance of the Study

My study will contribute to the literature on coaching, leadership development, and human resource development (HRD). My goal is to help HRD and learning and development professionals effectively intervene to coach and educate leaders on how to lead skillfully and effectively DEIB initiatives and embrace the bravery, vulnerability, and accountability necessary to make sustainable changes that promote organizational justice. In doing so, this research project has important practical and theoretical implications for critical Human Resource Development (HRD) scholarship and learning and development practices.

Hughes (2018) wrote in the introduction to a special HRD issue on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: "Unless diversity is understood and taken seriously by all organization leaders, it is futile to expect change to occur. Often leaders think that they know what diversity is and how to implement diversity initiatives. There is a gap in what leaders perceive that they know and what is actually communicated to diverse employees" (p. 259-260). Considering that leadership development receives the largest percentage allocation from training and development budgets of most organizations (Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Harris & Lebermann, 2012), reshaping or reconstructing leadership development to be more inclusive and critical can help affect needed change. The ongoing social inequities leading to social unrest and the current COVID crisis have altered how we interact and connect with others. Leadership can influence the values, policies, and practices that challenge performative-focused philosophies, oppose overt control over knowledge gained, and examine unbalanced power relations—the common principles of a critical HRD.

Practitioners in HRD, and more specifically learning and development practitioners, may find useful the exploration of how coaching has been used as part of leadership development to impact leaders' capacity to advance DEIB in organizations, particularly how coaching is perceived as a successful sustainable strategy in leadership development. For example, learning and development practitioners at organizations that offer minimum, basic diversity, equity, and inclusion training may find value from the strategies employed by these diversity, equity, and inclusion coaches. Additionally, this study's findings provided invaluable guidance to learning and development professionals seeking to transform their organization's leadership development programming to include

more inclusion training. Further, these findings may be especially meaningful to HRD and learning practitioners who thoughtfully navigate hostile opposition to improve leadership development by providing DEIB coaching.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand how coaching is used as a leadership development strategy to develop more inclusive leaders who can advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in organizations, specifically in the higher education sector. I used a critical Human Resource Development (HRD) framework to analyze the findings and conclusions resulting from the research data.

Two research questions guided this study:

1. What approaches do coaches use when developing more inclusive leaders in higher education?
2. What do coaches say about the challenges and benefits of DEIB coaching for leaders?

Previous studies of coaching employed in leadership development programs explored the efficacy of coaching used, as well as the experiences of adult learners receiving coaching in leadership development. However, focusing on using coaching for DEIB efforts in leadership development is lacking, especially looking at coaching leaders for DEIB in higher education. Therefore, the lack of empirical research in this area is a critical gap in the literature. Most conceptual literature has focused on critically examining leadership development through the lens of critical Human Resource Development (HRD) proposed frameworks, and a synthesis of these frameworks may foster perspective shifts in the context of DEIB as a strategic competency of coaching and

leadership development. This chapter consists of two major sections. First, I discuss literature regarding the state of DEIB in higher education to provide an overview of the contextual setting. The second section reviews the literature that informed this study's problem, discussing the conceptual and theoretical framework of critical HRD. This second section of the chapter is organized into three areas of scholarship, focusing on how a critical HRD framework can help examine how coaching is used in leadership development to develop more inclusive leaders. These three areas of inquiry are (1) the conceptual and theoretical literature on critical theory and its use in critical HRD frameworks; (2) empirical literature on inclusive leadership, and (3) the empirical literature on using coaching in leadership development programs. These areas of inquiry also inform this study's theoretical and conceptual framework, presented in Figure 2.1.

For this literature review, I conducted multiple online searches for each major section of this literature review. For the conceptual and theoretical framework, I searched the literature using a combination of keywords, such as *critical HRD, critical theory,* and *critical Human Resource Development.* I used Google Scholar and GALILEO at the University of Georgia library. I also performed a bibliography search of key articles. The sources used for this chapter included *Advances in Developing Human Resources, Human Resource Development International, Human Resource Development Review,* and *Human Resource Development Quarterly.* For the empirical research review of coaching used for leadership development, I searched online using combinations of keywords, such as *coaching, leadership development, leadership training, leader development, leader training, leadership coaching, higher education, critical human resources development, DEIB training, diversity training, inclusive leadership development, DEIB coaching, and*

inclusive coaching. I searched these terms online using Google Scholar, GALILEO at the University of Georgia library, and then reviewed various databases, including Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, and Sage Premier, and EBSCO. The sources that were used for this analysis included academic and practitioner journals, such as the *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*. I initially consulted abstracts and then sources deemed relevant were read in their entirety. I then analyzed the literature and synthesized it to develop this literature review.

Higher Education and Current State of DEIB

Higher education institutions are generally considered bastions of liberal and democratic values and thinking (Conway, 2022; Simon, 2022; Taylor et al., 2020; van de Werfhorst, 2020) and with a commitment to DEIB initiatives and social justice. These values and commitments have made higher education a frequent target of scrutiny and political attacks, especially from far-right groups. These attacks have included all-out bans of DEIB initiatives from both federal and state levels, resulting in job cuts and the closure of centers and diversity training programs. For example, in 2024, the Texas governor signed into law a ban on Texas universities' diversity efforts, resulting in job cuts (Coronado, 2024). In 2025, the United States President, hours after being sworn in, signed an executive order banning equity initiatives and DEIB considerations in hiring on a federal level (Ellis, 2025). This political backlash is not new; higher education has been a site of ideological and political conflict where they are expected to expand access and maintain equity, yet they increasingly face resistance when these ideals are considered threats.

Taylor et al. (2020) and Conway (2022) discussed this political conflict and its

impact on higher education institutes. Taylor et al. (2022) studied the link between partisan support (or lack of support), attitudes towards race, and state funding for higher education. The authors argued that a mistrust of higher education and its liberal ideals seem to unify those who identify with the Republican party. Taylor et al. (2020) discussed how higher education is often a target for Republicans because of its policies and practices "that explicitly aim to redress racial inequality" (p. 863). The authors pointed to evidence showing that the Republican party is overwhelmingly White, men, and Christian than is the country (p. 859). Because of these demographics, Taylor et al. (2020) characterized this type of backlash as white racial resentment. Taylor et al. (2020) found that state-level funding data does correspond to partisan politics where Republican-led states generally allocated less public funding to higher education.

Conway (2022) analyzed how the impetus for these attacks focuses on Critical Race Theory (CRT). This focus on CRT, Conway (2022) argued, served as a broader effort to undermine discourse, research, and education about systemic racism, reinforcing partisan rejection of DEIB initiatives. Conway (2022) discussed the link between higher education values, intent, and a transforming democratic society. She argued that higher education's commitment to advancing critical thinking, practicing freedom of speech and inquiry, and generating knowledge makes it vital to a democratic society. This commitment and the resulting actions are also what makes it a target for populist backlash movements, she argued, that "normalize human hierarchy in an attempt to stall unification of the American people around the democratic principles of equality and realism" (Conway, 2022, p. 711), and around diversity, equity, and inclusion, specifically racial equity and education of its fraught history in the United States. As an example, Conway (2022) cited

the 2020 Executive Order 13950, targeting and maligning Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its use in public education as a strategy to control and limit discussions of systemic oppression and its effect on racial equity. While the executive order has since been revoked, its ideals and purpose have made their way into state legislation. As of 2024, eighteen states have signed into law or similarly approved some sort of ban on Critical Race Theory (World Population Review, 2024). These types of attacks on racial equity and, similarly, on DEIB cause tension inside and outside of higher education. This tension is especially felt by those doing the work and who are also potentially subject to those attacks. Conway (2022) claimed that actions such as the orders banning CRT have had "the desired chilling effect on those who would otherwise engage in the larger discourse around . . . the reality of the pervasiveness of systemic racial inequality" (p. 713). This chilling effect places barriers to enacting meaningful DEIB initiatives.

Patton et al. (2019) reviewed empirical research on the different types of DEIB initiatives in higher education over a fifty-year span from 1968 – 2018. They identified four main categories of DEIB initiatives in higher education: student support programs, including (1) cultural or racial awareness workshops or centers; (2) curricular initiatives, including diversity-related courses; (3) administrative and leadership initiatives, including staff and faculty diversity training; and (4) policy initiatives, including diversity strategies (p. 184). From their analysis of these initiatives, Patton et al. (2019) expressed their skepticism that these initiatives are causing systemic change and instead the initiatives are serving as reactionary responses to outside pressures. The authors point to the lack of discussion outlining how the impact of DEIB initiatives is assessed. Moreover, they argued that the research of these initiatives lacked a critical framework or

analysis of systems of power and oppression. They concluded, “higher education has and continues to remain at a crossroads between asserting a stance in favor of DEIB and actually enacting that stance” (Patton et al., 2019, p. 191). Although DEIB initiatives were implemented, those initiatives did not exactly equate to real progress, thus suggesting incongruency. This incongruency is especially evident when DEIB initiatives are the first to be cut or eliminated during financially difficult times or when political pressure is placed on organizations to do so.

Patton et al. (2019) pointed out that DEIB initiatives in higher education are often accused of being “separatist” and “exclusive in nature” (p.178). However, these are assumptions based on exaggerations and “rooted in unsubstantiated assertions” (Patton et al., 2019, p. 178). Similarly, other research has also challenged these unsubstantiated assertions as biased or exaggerated. Simon (2022) demonstrated through a within-sibship analysis—comparing differences between siblings with different environmental exposure and experiences— that the link between higher education and liberal ideals and attitudes is weaker than commonly assumed. Despite higher education institutes being considered as inclusive spaces of democratic ideals, both Conway (2022) and Taylor (2020) maintained that it is not exactly free of racism and sexism, and they recognized that they still underserve historically marginalized communities. Therefore, despite, or maybe because of it, DEIB initiatives are more important to critically assess and implement.

The evolving landscape of DEIB in higher education continues to reveal tensions between its position as a catalyst for social progress—grounded in critical inquiry, academic freedom, and striving for equity— and with increasing scrutiny and challenges from political pressures seeking to curtail or eliminate DEIB initiatives. These tensions

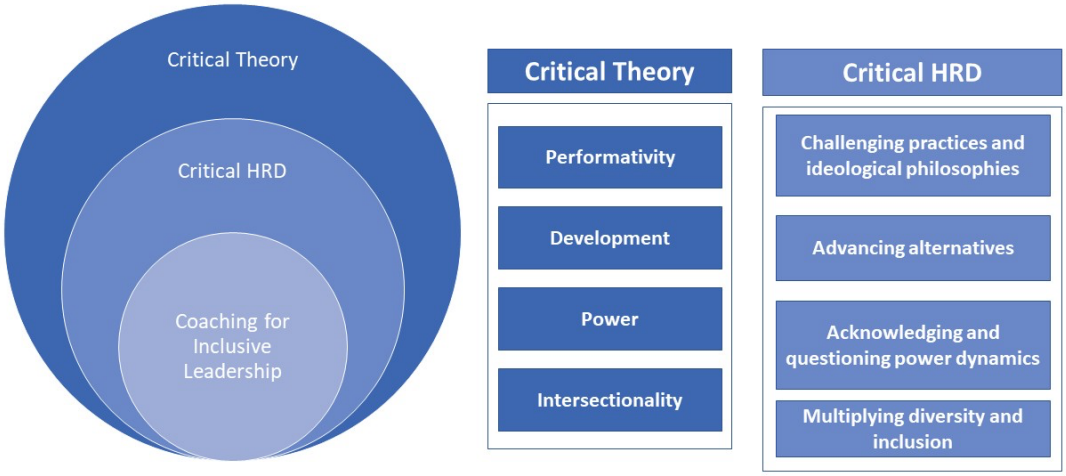
raise questions about how institutional leaders are prepared to act and navigate the complexities of the tensions. This study explores the use of coaching as a developmental strategy for developing more inclusive leaders and therefore draws on critical theory and critical HRD to examine how power, development, and intersectionality shape coaching for DEIB. These areas of inquiry inform the conceptual theoretical framework for this study, presented in Figure 2.1 in the following section.

Conceptual Theoretical Framework

The study's conceptual theoretical framework is situated in three significant bodies of inquiry for this literature review. In this section, I review the literature on each area and discuss the connections and gaps this study intends to fill.

Figure 2.1.

Conceptual Theoretical Framework



The framework begins by depicting the different components of critical theory that inform critical HRD strategies and frameworks. These components reflect key theoretical characteristics of critical theory or concerns from different critical theorists, drawing from Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Queer Theory, and Critical Theory.

These critical concerns also help illuminate potential barriers or challenges HRD researchers and practitioners may face when considering DEIB matters and competencies in leadership development. The first and second components of the conceptual theoretical framework are reflected in the research study's first research question: What approaches do coaches use when developing more inclusive leaders?

The second area of the framework conceptualizes critical Human Resource Development (HRD) and identifies crucial strategies for addressing DEIB generally and in coaching research and practice. This framework critically challenges and analyzes how leaders are being developed in traditional leadership development training programs that use coaching, specifically, to lead more inclusively. This part of the framework is the potential outcome of how coaching is used in leadership development to develop more inclusive leaders equipped to meet challenges and overcome barriers in DEIB efforts. The hypothesis is that HRD professionals and other learning and development professionals, such as coaches, use some element or form of these critical strategies in their research and practice.

The third area of the framework explores inclusive leadership and how coaching has been used and experienced in leadership development to develop more inclusive leaders. This representation considers the efficacy of coaching when used in leadership development and in the different coaching methods and approaches used to increase efficacy, especially with DEIB objectives. Of prime interest in this research study is how coaching may be a more effective approach to developing inclusive leaders who consider the individual concerns of the learner, as well as promoting more critical reflection and immediate feedback for growth and learning—necessary skills to help leaders consider

their influence and position to challenge oppressive systems and question inequitable power structures and cause organizational changes. These final areas of the conceptual theoretical framework are represented in the research study's first and second research questions: What approaches do coaches use when developing more inclusive leaders, and what do coaches say about the challenges and benefits of DEIB coaching for leaders?

Critical Theory

There is Critical Theory in the narrow sense and critical theory in the broader sense (Felluga, 2015). Critical Theory, in the narrow sense, developed around the first half of the 20th century from what is commonly known as the Frankfurt School in Germany. Critical theory provides a theoretical lens through which to better understand and explore issues of worker alienation, the commodification of labor, power dynamics, enactment of micro-aggressions, ideology, and knowledge, and the practice of repressive tolerance in organizations (Brookfield, 2014). The founders of the Frankfurt School set out to formulate a theory of society and were heavily influenced by Marxist philosophy. Its main distinctive characteristics include the primary analysis of "the conflicting relationship between social classes within an economy based on the exchange of commodities" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 23), or rather class oppression as a key idea explored. Critical Theory focuses on providing people with knowledge that would emancipate them from an oppressive capitalist state. This knowledge then serves to counter taken-for-granted assumptions that work to uphold oppressive beliefs. In the broader sense, contemporary critical theory, influenced by the Frankfort School theorists, includes different emancipatory perspectives, philosophies, ideas, and theories. These include feminism, queer theory, and critical race theory. These critical theories emerged with

social movements and expanded the scope to critique identity, such as gender, race, and sexuality. Indeed, these critical theories share other connections, such as a concern for social critique, power, and challenging normative assumptions that uphold systemic oppression and discrimination.

Critical theory offers a useful set of analytical tools and ideas to help us better identify, understand, and examine systems of oppression or discrimination. Held (1980) described the purpose of theory as to analyze and "expose the hiatus between the actual and the possible, between the existing order of contradictions and a potential future state. Theory must be oriented . . . to the development of consciousness and the promotion of active political involvement" (p. 22). In his discussion of Critical Theory, Held (1980) described the use of theory as a project of developing consciousness and promoting action, with a specific focus on social transformation. This view realizes the unrealized potential for more social justice in places once thought impossible—like in corporate America or a leadership development program. In other words, theory does not and should not be proprietary or limited to academe. Gramsci (1971) argued that each person "participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it that is to bring into being new modes of thought" (p. 9). I see this use of theory as also being applied to a critique of coaching and leadership development research and practice and in helping to realize a more inclusive learning experience for those seeking to better their circumstances within organizations. Use of theory to critique (the *critical* in critical theory) and understand knowledge—who has access to it and what and who validates knowledge production—and power relations—understanding power is not one-

dimensional, and the potential of these realizations serves to support more inclusive research and practice. This research and practice includes a capacity to address systems of oppression.

The Intersection of Critical Theory and Adult Learning

Because I use a learning-centered definition of coaching, it is important to discuss how critical theory is relevant to adult learning. This focus on learning and development is also a primary focus of human resource development researchers and practitioners and for this study. There has been much literature on the significant impact of critical theory on different perspectives of adult learning theory (Askew & Carnell, 2011; Brookfield, 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mezirow, 1981; Welton, 1993). Indeed, Welton (1993) claimed that a philosophy of adult learning influenced by critical theory starts "with the affirmation that human beings are *material* and *historical* beings who have the potential to learn about nature, others, and the self" (p. 83). What Welton is saying is that critical theory provides a frame where all learning is not confined or reduced to a single model and helps us see it as cumulative. Learning is embedded in our social and political environment, institutions, and practices—in our physical and historical existence. We have the potential to learn in more holistic ways, not just in a technical way. Learners can question assumptions and seek to understand better the social environments in which we exist, and that learning, questioning, and understanding has the potential to foster personal and societal change.

A major contribution to adult learning theory comes from Jurgen Habermas and his theories about knowledge and language in social and historical contexts. Habermas, a second-generation critical theorist from the Frankfurt school, posited that knowledge has

three domains: technical, practical, and emancipatory (Askew & Carnell, 2011; Mezirow, 1981; Welton, 1993). These domains can be seen as grounded in different aspects of a learner's interests or rather social contexts or functions, such as work (technical), interaction (practical), and power (emancipatory) (Mezirow, 1981). The technical domain is learning to act in and to control the environment and involves developing skills and competencies, such as learning a new application. The practical domain involves communicative actions for understanding meaning and personal interactions, such as engaging in dialogue about one's experiences. The third domain, emancipatory, involves critical self-reflection, awareness, questioning assumptions, leading to transformative action with the self, ideologies, assumptions, and power structures. Welton (1993) pointed out that Habermas's theories of knowledge, language, and society provided a fresh, alternate approach of looking at adult learning in social contexts. He argued that Habermas's theory of three different forms, or domains, of knowledge provided a "powerful means of understanding the unity in the diversity of human learning processes and outcomes" (Welton, 1993, p. 82). This statement demonstrates that learning has the power to enact holistic change. However, learning in the third domain is difficult and has been underused in traditional learning and development (Askew & Carnell, 2011), especially in the workplace where technical and practical skills are easier to measure.

Mezirow (1981) synthesized his work on perspective transformation with his interpretation of Habermas's three domains of adult learning. Mezirow (1981) argued that the emancipatory action of learning, the third domain in Habermas's theory, was the least familiar domain with adult learning researchers and educators, and this is the domain he associates most with his theory on perspective transformation. This theory informs the

broader concept of transformative learning, a major theory in adult learning (Hoggan et al., 2017). Mezirow (1981) defined perspective transformation as an

> Emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (p. 6)

The key component in Mezirow's (1981) definition is critical reflection, which he views as an emancipatory action. He argued that this fills a gap in adult learning by creating awareness of how and why we make meaning of our experiences being in society and how we interact with others. Therefore, we can critically examine how we understand those meanings and on what assumptions—through cultural or otherwise— they may or may not be based. Additionally, a key action of adult learning practitioners is facilitating critical reflection to help learners build empathy and competence in human relations. Mezirow (1981) claimed that facilitating critical reflection helps learners "enhance their understanding of and sensitivity to the way others anticipate, perceive, think and feel while involved with the learner in common endeavors" (p. 18). He is saying that when learners engage in critical reflection, they also consider contexts outside of their own experiences and beliefs and see how meaning is developed out of shared contexts, interactions, culture, and other social contexts. These social contexts and relations can also involve critical reflection on power rooted in ideologies and aid the learning in a critique of "psycho-cultural assumptions" (Mezirow, 1981). These actions provide the capability of accessing alternative meanings for interpreting social contexts and relations,

and these actions prompt us to open lines of critical questioning. Welton (1993) gave examples of what this line of critical reflection and questioning could look like, such as "Should adult educators go along with corporate-defined agendas for training of workers? Should we accept the restricted ways in which competence is defined by some educators and policymakers?" (p. 84). Critical reflection and questioning have significant implications for human resource development and learning professionals. It also has significant possibilities for understanding and approaching critical DEIB coaching. Indeed, the influence of critical theory extends beyond Habermas's three domains of knowledge or adult learning. Merriam and Bierema (2014) argued that it provided a framework for "critiquing social conditions and . . . challeng[ing] universal truths and dominant ideologies" (p. 215). This framework for critique and challenge is especially useful for a more critical human resource development (HRD). Next, I will discuss the core concepts from critical theory that inform critical HRD.

Core Ideas of Critical Theory

Many critical theory concepts are central to understanding and using critical HRD as a conceptual and theoretical framework. These foundational concepts and their analyses include performativity, development, power, and intersectionality. Each of these is useful to HRD as it accounts for key aspects of organizations and can be used to understand and challenge common dynamics and contradictions in HRD, advancing a more critical HRD.

Performativity

A major action of HRD and leadership development that bolsters commodification is the hyper-focus on performativity—a core concern of critical HRD.

A critical understanding of performativity is based on Fournier and Grey's interpretation of Lyotard as "the intent to develop and celebrate knowledge which contributes to the production of maximum output for minimum input" (as qtd in Fenwick, 2004, p. 202). This is not to be confused with feminist and queer theory's use of performativity as a social construct of gender, sexuality, and race through language acts, gestures, and other social signs (Felluga, 2015)—although that would make an interesting analysis. For Lyotard, in the critical theory use, performativity is understood in terms of production and commodification as it serves to further objectify knowledge and labor and subordinate it to the production of efficiency (Fenwick, 2004).

HRD research and practice continue to maintain its focus on performativity and therefore can seem like a contradiction with critical perspectives. Of course, organizations have objectives they must meet, and many of these are driven by shareholders and profit. However, when it leads to privileging profits over the interests and care of organization employees, then it devolves efforts towards inclusive practices and thus underscores objectifying humans as nothing more than organizational assets (Fenwick, 2004). A myopic focus on the bottom line and performance can stifle innovation and new ways of "understanding complex individual and organizational problems" (Gedro, Collins, & Rocco, 2014, p. 531). Performance itself is not necessarily bad, as many HRD practitioners have pointed out. It just needs a more holistic balance, meaning that it is not solely for maximizing efficiency and profits that are not equitably shared or for the commodification of employees. (Bierema, 2009; Bierema & Callahan, 2014); Nevertheless, it still needs to be critically examined to avoid unequal concern for organizational needs over employee needs. There should be a balance with other

organizational variables (Bierema, 2009), such as individual needs and values, to promote more inclusive practices.

Commodification. A major characteristic of critical theory is the ongoing analysis of commodification and objectification of labor (Brookfield, 2014). Commodification can be described as the subordination of things to the logic of capitalism. This logic entails that things, such as labor, knowledge, and time, are perceived in terms of the extrinsic or monetary value they hold—what they can be traded for in the marketplace (Felluga, 2015). By this capitalistic logic, employees can be reduced or reconceptualized as assets and thus objectified by executive leadership, owners, and shareholders.

Commodification, or rather attempting to avoid its oppressive logic, is a rationale for critical HRD researchers and practitioners to challenge HR practices and ideological philosophies continually. This challenge starts with questioning ourselves. For example, the title of the field, Human Resource Development, implies humans as resources or, even worse, as capital. This phrasing turns employees into an asset or a commodity, suggesting employees are owned and, therefore, justifiably controlled by the organization (Brookfield, 2014). Perhaps humans as resources are not the intent of HRD; instead, it may be quite the opposite where HRD provides resources for humans. At any rate, I do not see HRD revising its name anytime soon; however, as HRD researchers and practitioners, we need to remain cognizant and critical of what "Human Resources" implies and how it can serve to commodify organization employees. We also need to be critically aware of how it shapes how others perceive our intent and actions. Therefore, by challenging and critiquing HRD practices and philosophies, we work towards negating

any misconceptions (or expectations) that HRD or leadership development perform research or develop humans as organizational assets.

Development

HRD researchers and practitioners also need to assess critically the concept and practices of development. The concept of development in HRD research and practice can be problematic in what it can signify. Therefore, HRD and leadership development researchers and practitioners need to question critically, "For whose interests are being served when we develop leaders? Whose goals are being met, the individual's or the organization's? Who has access to development, and who doesn't?" For example, leadership development in organizations that are driven solely by performance needs is often seen as a mere investment in human capital and a means of control (Bierema, 2009; Fenwick, 2004). This framing further commodifies employees' labor and potential. Brookfield (2014) argued that when labor and potential are represented as a commodity to give organizations a competitive edge in the global marketplace, it further reduces work as human capital or rather a commodity owned by the organization.

A common practice in leadership development (or in most training and professional development) is the urgency to show a return on investment, or the ROI, for training and development. ROI is the calculated profit earned on an investment made. For example, when ROI is used as the only measure of impact, or when it influences decision-making about leadership development, it can negate any possible intrinsic value obtained from learning—such as better work-life balance or demonstration of inclusive practices. Reducing leadership development, or more broadly learning, as a means to

increase profitability, therefore, turns it into a mechanism of control and maintains the exchange economy (Brookfield, 2005).

Worse is when diversity and inclusion training is rationalized by its ROI because then it misses the whole point for DEIB—to multiply diversity and to increase real inclusion and belonging, in other words, to make all people feel welcomed, heard, and they belong. According to Triana (2017), research proposed at least six major arguments that make a business case for DEIB training and development. Half of those arguments were grounded in how DEIB can increase financial performance: the cost argument, the resource-acquisition argument, and the marketing argument (Triana, 2017, p. 324). Ultimately, these arguments showcase the extrinsic, monetary value of DEIB—saving money in the long run, acquiring the best and brightest employees as resources, and improving an organization's marketability in different countries. These three arguments commodify and, therefore, objectify DEIB practices and development, which is counter-intuitive to the purpose of DEIB as challenging oppressive structures that objectify others, to say the least.

Another issue with development is who has and does not have access to certain kinds of knowledge, especially leadership development. Many leadership development programs are usually limited to so-called "high potentials" or to positional leaders. If the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities is used to help move up the hierarchical ladder, or the structure of an organization, then this unequal access privileges those who are tapped as "high potentials," limiting diversity and inclusion in leadership and leadership development. Moreover, these "high potential" focused leadership development programs can cause organizations to validate only certain types of

knowledge or skills (Collins, 2012), therefore imposing power and control and commodifying knowledge. Being critical of and exposing these oppressive practices supports more employees' needs and creates more inclusive definitions of meaningful development (Fenwick, 2004).

Power

Critical theory helps to understand how power works at all levels and how it is exercised, received, supported, retained, and perpetuated. Power supports and maintains dominant ideas and values that permeate beliefs and cultures. It is important to understand that power is not one-dimensional nor one-sided; power is dynamic. Foucault (1980) claimed power is everywhere "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (p. 93). What is implied from the idea that power comes from everywhere is that it forms a "complex strategical situation" (Foucault, 1980, p. 93) where power is relational. It resides inside and outside of relationships, coming from both sides or, rather more accurately, from multiple sides or innumerable points. (Foucault, 1980). What is meant is that power is relational and goes beyond the understanding it is between people; but it is also the relationship with structures, environment, culture, past, present, our notions of the future, and so on.

In organizations, unbalanced or even unchecked power relations can create complacency with unmitigated biases towards underrepresented employees. When those in power choose to ignore concerns of discrimination or even fail to recognize how a chosen few are privileged while others are marginalized, it can create insurmountable barriers for change toward an inclusive culture to occur. Developing awareness and being critical of power relations addresses this complacency and opens up possibilities for

sharing power and giving voice to others who were previously unheard or outright ignored. As HRD and leadership development researchers and practitioners, it can be easy to take for granted, or not even realize, our own power or unbalanced power relations. For example, if coaching is mandated, as opposed to a freely chosen leadership development option, then a critical HRD practice would be to examine the power relationships involved and how those dynamics impact the individual's learning experience.

This critical action applies to how we equip leaders as well. Coaches who engage in critical HRD and work to develop more inclusive leaders can engage coachees to reflect on their own influence and power relations as it relates to their development. Indeed, leadership development programs should include learning outcomes focusing on equipping leaders to understand and question their power and responsibility in organizations. Additionally, when using coaching in these programs, coaches can use the coaching process and thoughtful questioning to help them reflect on their ability to use that power to make organizations more inclusive and to use their responsibility with the power to lead by example. Gittell (2001) pointed out that "Organizations take on their leaders' personalities" (p. 3). Leaders set the tone in the organization—they have the power to influence, sponsor, and make decisions that impact others within the organization. Understanding their position of power, inclusive leaders can affect change by presenting a vision of organizational and social possibilities and interventions that can move social systems to a more robust state (Salas, 2006).

Hegemony. Hegemony is a key mechanism in which power operates and is maintained. It is defined as the process where the dominant culture maintains its position through the spreading and reiterating of taken-for-granted assumptions and their ideals to bolster the belief that an unjust social order is a natural, necessary, and normal state (Felluga, 2015). It is those uncontested beliefs and ideals serving as the knowledge that uphold the critiques of development and for using ROI as an attractive rationale to invest in inclusive leadership development and therefore convince others to accept their subjection in oppressive conditions. Leadership development researchers and practitioners serve the status quo when using ROI as a rationale to invest in inclusive leadership development. They are, therefore, working against their own best interests in wanting to increase capacity for DEIB as opposed to increasing profits (Brookfield, 2014).

Understanding hegemony provides a lens through which to contest universal beliefs or dominant ideals. Advancing alternative perspectives and knowledge can help counter those contested dominant ideals. Moreover, developing leaders to question and challenge critically the status quo can create the conditions for more inclusive voices and ideas to be heard or emerge. Considering new perspectives and putting forth new knowledge can weaken strong-hold beliefs. Coaching leaders to think more critically about where certain ideals come from and whose interests those ideals are serving can expand their capacity to address systemic issues in meaningful ways.

Indeed, hegemony is served through uncontested assumptions and knowledge and when critical HRD researchers and practitioners fail to advance counter or alternative

knowledge and perspectives. Hegemony is also reinforced through unrealized power and in which that power is exercised.

Intersectionality

Based on the Critical Race Theory and the Black feminist legal work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is a theory considering how the different and multiple markers of identity interact or intersect together exacerbating oppression and discrimination (Felluga, 2015). Moreover, intersectionality stresses that intersecting identities can affect a person differently at different times, depending on context and situations which may render one identity marker more salient than another. For instance, for a black lesbian leader, her race and gender may be more prominent in the workplace whereas her sexuality may be when at a restaurant with her lover. This shifting also applies to shared identity, meaning, the black lesbian leader's experience is not indicative of all black lesbian leaders' experiences. The concept of intersectionality is useful in helping leaders think more holistically about experiences (Collins, 2012).

Additionally, to multiply diversity, we need to develop leadership programs with more inclusive enrollments and ways of presenting knowledge and skills. Ensuring a diverse cohort of participants—in position, identity, and knowledge—is also needed and can open a space where previous subjugated knowledge had once been discouraged. Santamaria, et al. (2022) contended “that leadership frameworks should include multiple perspectives to effectively develop all of those who lead and to contribute to more inclusive models of leadership" (Santamaria, et al, 2022, p. 174). Indeed, leadership development scholars need to be aware of different experiences and different ways of knowing and how this impacts experiences. For example, Hill Collins (2000) discussed

the different ways of knowing Black women and how Black feminist thought, for example, would be viewed as subjugated knowledge. According to Collins, Black women wished to “rearticulate a Black women’s standpoint” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 203), countering so-called valid knowledge about black women’s lives and experiences based on positivists views, only to be suppressed by a white-male “controlled knowledge validation process” (p. 204). Here, Hill Collins’s (2000) action of countering dominant knowledge of black women’s lives and experiences reveals how multiplying diversities connects with an understanding of intersectionality. Meaning that intersectionality can provide a deeper, more meaningful understanding of how different ways of knowing related to identity, especially outside of dominant ways of knowing, impact a person’s experience. Collins (2012) pointed out: "To contest the status quo means not only to know but also to wholeheartedly believe, that identity matters" (p. 354). Therefore, it is important to help leaders understand the effect identity can have on how they lead others. It is critical for inclusive leadership development to (re)examine how we develop leaders to think of diversity by incorporating the different ways of knowing, being, and thinking.

Microaggressions. A contemporary development of critical theory examines the link between power and microaggressions in the workplace and how it impacts DEIB. Brookfield (2014), drawing from Critical Race Theory (CRT), saw microaggressions as "embedded in small actions" of the day-to-day behaviors we engage in at work, such as gestures, tone of voice, and so on. Microaggressions are aggressive in that the recipient experiences these small actions as marginalizing or dismissive. However, these actions are “so opaque that the recipient is usually left wondering, 'Did that really happen, or am I being overly sensitive and imagining some sinister purpose where none really exists?'"

(Brookfield, 2014, p. 420). Microaggressions perpetuate dominating power in the fact that the acts are so small and partially concealed, they can cause the recipient to blame themselves for the indiscretion and allow the perpetrator a space to deny wrongful intent. Helping leaders to first recognize and acknowledge microaggressions can help minimize impact and create a better sense of belonging. Inclusive leaders will need to develop skills to be vulnerable to receiving feedback that their actions may be hurtful.

This view of how theory is used also informs the evolution of critical HRD's conceptualization. As I will discuss next, critical HRD ultimately argues for more socially conscious research and practices guided by precepts, influenced by the critical foundations discussed.

Conceptualizing Critical HRD

As with any evolving, fluid concept, it is hard to define critical HRD. Instead of defining critical HRD, Fenwick (2005), drawing from a critical theoretical perspective, listed a set of precepts as a foundation of how critical HRD could be enacted. These included: (1) Purpose of critical HRD is to reform the workplace; (2) Knowledge in critical HRD is understood to be contested; (3) Inquiry in critical HRD is focused on power; and (4) Methods of critical HRD expose and challenge dominant ideologies consisting of structures of inequity (p. 228-229). Ultimately, Fenwick's (2005) precepts provided a focus for critical HRD to transform organizations and to shift practices and research toward more equitable and inclusive practices. There is also a focus on making organizations and HRD research and practices more just through critical analysis of oppressive structures and systems and other critiques of HRD.

In a similar vein, Bierema (2009) offered a conceptual view of critical HRD as a starting point for HRD practitioners to critically reexamine practices. This conceptual view contained a call

> To challenge performative HRD philosophy and practice arguing for a critical and socially conscious HRD that problematizes its precepts by challenging the commodification of employees; involving multiple stakeholders; contesting the nature of power relations pursuing wide-ranging goals; providing alternative, nonoppressive, and holistic models for cultivating development in a work context; and transforming the workplace. (p. 72)

In this conceptual view based on critical and feminist theories, Bierema (2009) outlines critiques of HRD, providing its researchers and practitioners with a conceptual framework to be more self-reflexive. This framework prompts HRD researchers and practitioners to question how they may be supporting oppressive systems and to provide more inclusive practices and research. The framework, in a sense, provides an alternative method for critical analysis and practice to address the critiques. Indeed, others took a similar alternative approach of providing conceptual frameworks and focus instead of pinning critical HRD down to a singular definition.

In examining how HRD discussed and framed the concept of leadership, Collins (2012) also resisted defining critical HRD and instead advanced strategies of how to be critical in HRD based on previous work from Callahan (2007), Sambrook (2009), and Trehan & Rigg (2010). These critical strategies urge researchers and practitioners to "(a) expose assumptions, (b) multiply diversity, (c) acknowledge power, (d) transform practice, (e) embrace "others," and (f) advance alternatives" (Collins, 2012, p. 351).

Here, Collins's (2012) strategies incorporate some of the common critiques in HRD Fenwick (2005) and Bierema (2009) laid out in their work. He also advanced other strategies, implying a queer theoretical approach, such as a call for the "multiplication of diversity" (Collins, 2012, p. 351) to expand diversity beyond mere statistics and to incorporate practices that support belonging and ways to validate all identity groups, such as more inclusion of LBGTQ+ community. Additionally, Osafo and Yawson (2020) echoed this need to multiply diversity and reframe the way HRD researchers and practitioners discuss social issues and inequalities to be even more inclusive. They called for critical HRD to include more critical work and research from indigenous ecological knowledge, a cultural and generational body of knowledge about "the relationship between living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (Osafo & Yawson, 2020, p. 260). Similarly, these proposed frameworks and calls to work towards embracing others were extended to include more critically diverse perspectives and theories, especially in leadership development research and practice. Santamaria, et al. (2022) noted a lack of theoretical frameworks, such as critical race theory, representing women of color—especially Black, African American, and Indigenous women leaders—and their experiences in leadership and leadership development, as well as how intersectionality affects those experiences.

Indeed, critical HRD presents compelling critiques of HRD and leadership development. It also provides useful strategies to be more critical in addressing and correcting those critiques and to inform leadership development research and practice. Moreover, critical HRD can be useful in interrogating the intersection of organizational culture as a system of encoding dominant ideas and practices that support and enforce

discrimination and exclusive practices. In the next section, I will discuss the strategies and elements of critical HRD that informed my research and practice toward DEIB transformation in leaders.

Elements of Critical HRD

Reviewing the work conceptualizing critical HRD mentioned in the previous section, I have synthesized the crucial strategies or elements into a framework in which to inform my research and practice of leadership development, specifically developing more inclusive leaders. The critical strategies or elements include (a) Challenging practices and ideological philosophies, (b) advancing alternative conceptual and theoretical models and perspectives, (c) acknowledging and questioning power dynamics, and (d) multiplying diversity and inclusion.

Challenging Practices and Ideological Philosophies

The work of being critical starts with ourselves and our responsibilities as researchers and practitioners. Turning a critical eye on yourself and your practices can be difficult and anxiety-inducing. However, most HRD researchers and practitioners neglect to ask themselves if their leadership development focus and interventions in some way perpetuate the status quo that discriminates and/or has "serious human and environmental consequences" (Trehan & Riggs, 2011, p. 280). There is a need to check if and how our work is preventing or sustaining status quo culture and practices that enable and sustain inequities. Additionally, there is a need for constant critical discussion and examination of the core ideological principles that define HRD. These include critiquing the name itself, "Human Resource Development," and its core focus of enhancing performance through development. To be clear, there is not anything inherently wrong with this core

focus; however, implications of it could enable and sustain inequities when not critically reflecting on whose interests are (and are not) being served.

Advancing Alternative Conceptual and Theoretical Models and Perspectives

Challenging deeply held beliefs and assumptions and advancing alternative knowledge and perspectives are core components of critical theories. Being open to alternative perspectives and theoretical models is a critical step in reconceptualizing leadership development research and practices. For example, incorporating DEIB learning into leadership development programs can help re-categorize DEIB as necessary leadership competencies as opposed to DEIB being treated as a problem to be addressed or managed (Fenwick, 2005). Advancing alternative models and perspectives would also need to be sponsored and advanced by those in positions with the power to affect a shift (Collins, 2012). Additionally, to challenge and expose unstated assumptions and critically assess "shifting established structures" (Trehan & Rigg, 2011, p. 8) would also require us to question how knowledge is produced, by and for whom, and to be open to different theoretical models and perspectives to inform those challenges.

Acknowledging and Questioning Power Dynamics

Power dynamics receive little attention in both HRD and leadership development literature, and this oversight affects our ability to be effective (Bierema, 2009). A critical understanding of how power operates and where it appears is warranted to examine power dynamics in our roles as researchers and practitioners. Trehan (2004) noted "A key rationale for encouraging human resource developers to be critical lies in the realization of how powerful managers are now, yet how poorly traditional HRD education has prepared them for considering questions of power and responsibility" (p. 30). This

acknowledgment extends to encouraging leaders as well to acknowledge their responsibility and accountability with how they influence others and the structures which keep power unbalanced.

Multiplying Diversity and Inclusion

Collins (2012) defined the concept of multiplying diversity and inclusion as challenging accepted practices and policies that privilege only a few and thinking and promoting new ways of how organizations think about diversity. Researchers and practitioners should critically examine how the organization's culture, structure, and systems in place create conditions for multiple ways of being, knowing, and thinking (Bierema, 2009). These also need to be critically challenged to ensure that inclusion and belonging exist. Inclusion and belonging do not automatically occur from merely increasing diversity, especially if the intent of increasing diversity is only to check boxes.

Central to critical HRD is the examination of how organizations develop leaders and how leadership practices are either sustained or challenged within systems of power. This study applies a critical HRD lens to explore the role of coaching in developing inclusive leaders—those capable of advancing equity, inclusion, and belonging within complex institutional contexts. The following section reviews the literature on inclusive leadership, building on this theoretical foundation to clarify how coaching may serve as a strategic and developmental tool in support of DEIB-focused leadership.

Inclusive Leadership

There are a few empirical studies examining the impact of leadership development on building leader inclusiveness or DEIB competencies, and much of the

literature has only recently been published. However, empirical research has examined the effects of inclusive leadership in the workplace.

Nembhard and Edmondson's (2006) study examined the construct of leader inclusiveness. They defined leader inclusiveness as "words and deeds exhibited by leaders that invite and appreciate others' contributions" (p. 941). To examine leader inclusiveness, they tested a model of engagement in team-based quality improvement work that included leader inclusiveness, status, and psychological safety. The research sample included twenty-three healthcare workers in Natal Intensive Care Units (NICU) and 1440 surveyed healthcare workers in NICUs at various locations throughout the United States. Data collection was conducted in three phases and included semi-structured interviews and survey participation. The data analysis used a mixed methods design.

Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) hypothesized that leader inclusiveness moderates the relationship between status and psychological safety among organizational team members and that leader inclusiveness is positively associated with psychological safety. The results of their study confirmed that greater leader inclusiveness minimized the effect of status on psychological safety and vice versa and encouraged engagement and collaborative learning in low professional-status team members. In other words, with more leader inclusiveness comes greater psychological safety. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) found inclusive leaders exhibit behaviors such as attempting to include others in decision-making and discussion through invitation and appreciation where those others' voices might be otherwise absent. When felt included and

appreciated, others felt safe to speak up about team issues and contribute more ideas to generate more effective services and quality.

Other studies continued Nembhard and Edmondson's (2006) research on the positive impact of leader inclusiveness on psychological safety and how this relationship affected other aspects of how employees perform at work (Carmeli et al., 2010; Hirak et al., 2011; Li at al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2015). For example, Carmeli et al. (2010) examined how inclusive leadership and its positive effect on psychological safety could enhance employee involvement in creative work. Adding to Nembhard and Edmondson's (2006) definition of leader inclusiveness, they described inclusive leaders as also exhibiting "openness, accessibility, and availability in their interactions with followers" (Carmeli et al., 2010, p. 250). They claimed when leaders are found to be accessible and available to hear and discuss new ideas from others, they create conditions where people feel safe to speak up and engage in sharing ideas and solutions. The sample included 150 employees working in research and development units developing advanced technological products. Carmeli et al. (2010) used structured surveys administered at two points in time. These surveys measured three dimensions of inclusive leadership: openness, availability, and accessibility. They also measured to what extent an employee feels safe to take risks and speak up, and they measured employee involvement in creative work. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM), examining the relationship between the three variables measured. The results of their study also confirmed that inclusive leadership is positively associated with psychological safety and is also positively related to employee involvement in creative work (Carmeli et al., 2010). Additionally, Hirak et al. (2011) surveyed 277 hospital employees in Israel. Their study

further examined the effect of leader inclusiveness on psychological safety and employees' ability to learn from failures in their work unit. They found that this effect of employees feeling safe to make and learn from mistakes mediated better work performance.

Supporting and fostering inclusiveness in diverse teams has also been shown to improve performance and a sense of belonging, as well as impacting team identity (Ashikali et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2015). For example, Mitchell et al. (2015) also found that team performance increased in diverse teams when leaders engage in inclusive behaviors, such as including others in decision-making and showing appreciation for this input. Adapting Nembhard and Edmondson's (2006) leader inclusiveness scale, Mitchell et al. (2015) surveyed 346 health professionals at different Australian hospitals. Their study found that leader inclusiveness reduced perceived status differences and thus strengthened team identity.

Askikali et al. (2021) studied inclusiveness within diverse teams. Surveying 293 employees working in different public sector teams, their study showed that greater team diversity does not automatically yield feelings of inclusiveness. Their data indicated that teams with great ethnic-cultural diversity resulted in lower team inclusiveness. However, for those teams where inclusive leadership is high, the effect "attenuates the negative association between team ethnic-cultural diversity and an inclusive climate" (p. 508), supporting the hypothesis that inclusive leadership is necessary to moderate the relationship between team diversity and inclusive environment.

These studies have shown the benefits of inclusive leadership on psychological safety, team inclusiveness, and performance from the perspective of team members.

Roberson and Perry (2022) examined how leaders perceive and demonstrate inclusive leadership practices, as well as how these leaders make sense of their experiences of being inclusive leaders. Their sample included 27 leaders of an extensive United States healthcare system who were enrolled in a two-day executive leadership course on inclusive leadership. Roberson and Perry (2022) analyzed written responses to questions about how the sample perceived and demonstrated inclusive leadership, identifying themes and patterns. The results showed eleven themes for how leaders perceived inclusive leadership and ten themes for how inclusive leadership is enacted. These themes included valuing and understanding differences, communication, and agency (p. 768). Roberson and Perry's (2022) results showed that leadership perceptions of what is inclusive leadership and how it is demonstrated align with previous studies showing the positive effects of inclusive leadership on psychological safety (Carmeli et al., 2010; Hirak et al., 2011; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006) team engagement (Ashikali et al., 2021; Carmeli et al., 2010; Li et al., 2019), and work performance (Carmeli et al., 2010; Hirak et al., 2011; Li et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2015).

The studies reviewed for this section examined the positive effects of inclusive leadership and its impact on teams. While each of these studies suggested what these inclusive leadership behaviors could entail—such as openness, appreciation, approachability, and communication—none of the studies explored how leaders develop these skills. Indeed, Roberson and Perry's (2022) study showed how leaders perceive and demonstrate inclusive leadership. The implications of this study highlighted behaviors and strategies for creating inclusive and supportive environments, as well as behaviors facilitating a sense of belonging and creating conditions where employees feel safe to

voice ideas and concerns. Similarly, Veli Korkmaz et al. (2022) performed a systematic literature review that included 107 papers to research what behaviors entailed inclusive leadership. They identified four dimensions of inclusive leadership: fostering employee uniqueness, strengthening belongingness within a team, supporting organizational efforts, and showing appreciation. However, these studies do not explore how leaders develop these behaviors and strategies or learn how to foster inclusive environments. There is an opportunity, therefore, to examine how empirically supported inclusive leadership behaviors are integrated into leadership development approaches—particularly through coaching, which offers a personalized and reflective alternative to traditional programs.

Coaching

Leadership development opportunities should not be one-size-fits-all but should instead fit the needs of participants within their specific frame of mind and context (Mattar et al., 2018). Leaders face complex and unique challenges in different contexts, and coaching can offer an appropriate developmental strategy to help them address such challenges. In this section, I review current empirical studies that examine broadly how coaching has been used and its impact on leader and leadership development.

Coaching as effective leadership development

To meet changing and complex challenges in different environments, coaching has become a top leadership development strategy in many organizations, as well as a growing topic of research (Carey et al., 2011; Theeboom et al., 2014). Without a doubt, the coaching industry has grown substantially in the last few decades and continues to expand rapidly. Hamlin et al. (2009) reported that between 25% and 40% of US Fortune 500 companies use executive coaching, and this number is growing. Leaders, as well as

coaching practitioners, in these organizations have reported positive results, including "improved team functioning, increased engagement, improved employee relations, and increased commitment" (DiGirolamo, 2015, p.4). Indeed, coaching has been recognized as effective by organizations and practitioners.

In recent years, the amount of empirical research showing the efficacy of leadership coaching has increased significantly, indicating coaching is a prominent learning experience to enhance capacity development and increase leader motivation and self-confidence compared to other learning methods used in leadership development. For example, coaching has shown a greater impact on performance than general training (classroom, role play, etc.) alone. Day (2000) reviewed a study showing an 88% increase in productivity when executive coaching was used as a follow-up to a training program compared with training alone. Theeboom et al. (2014) set out to determine coaching effectiveness compared to other leadership development, specifically coaching's impact on performance skills, well-being, coping, work attitudes, and goal-directed motivation. Conducting a meta-analysis review of coaching research, they found that coaching has significant positive effects on all categories. Theeboom et al.'s (2014) analysis shows only some of the benefits of coaching on leader and leadership development.

McNamara et al. (2014) evaluated coaching, mentoring, and action-learning interventions used in leadership development. Using individual interviews, focus groups, and observations, they noted how coaching was positively experienced by program participants and contributed to the development of leadership competencies. Moreover, coaching provided a more long-term, sustainable commitment to development by

providing continued self-reflection and feedback on leadership skills thus enabling learning transfer and growth.

Coaching has also been shown to be effective in helping leaders address unique challenges. Mattar, et al. (2018) explored how Arab women leaders experienced coaching as leadership development. Mattar et al. (2018) argued that leaders face unique challenges, especially women leaders of color, and these challenges can change under different contexts and at different stages in the leader's development journey. Each of Mattar et al.'s (2018) research participants reported coaching as having the greatest impact compared to other developmental tools. The reported benefits of coaching in this study included an increase in self-awareness and confidence. The participants also reported the benefit of being challenged and cultivating reflection on their abilities to perform and become better (Mattar, et al., 2018).

Other coaching research has indicated the positive impact coaching has on increasing self-awareness and confidence, key factors in motivation, leader identity development, and learning. Trevillion (2018) identified the top two common outcomes experienced by leaders who received coaching as part of a leadership development program were self-efficacy and developing a positive outlook. In the study, Trevilion (2018) examined the outcomes of coaching and whether those outcomes were determined based on the coachee's personal goals or identified based on organizational goals. Further, he investigated what behaviors, if any, had changed since receiving coaching, and how coachees and their managers would determine there was a change from coaching that occurred. Trevillion (2018) employed a qualitative case study design consisting of five coachee and manager dyadic cases. The results of the study showed

that the two most common issues for coaching identified by both the coachee and the manager that were in agreement, meaning both identified the same issues, were low confidence, self-esteem, and control and needing more proactivity, initiative, and planning, which coaching positively impacted. Further, Ladegard & Gjerde (2014) assessed the efficacy of coaching as a leadership development intervention in these areas. Using a mixed method, exploratory sequential design with a six-month leadership coaching program, their data showed a positive link between coaching and an increased leader role efficacy and leaders' trust in direct reports.

These outcomes further support earlier research on the impact coaching has on developing more confident and bold leadership behaviors, such as effectively facing complex challenges and better management of risk. Simpson (2010) found that coaching can make a positive contribution to improving leadership development by helping coachees become clear of and articulate how they conceptualize leadership, a critical process in leader identity development. Coaching also positively affected how research participants understood their leadership capabilities, challenges, and competencies needed to be effective. Simpson (2010) found that coaching assisted greatly in the conceptualization of leadership in that it provided a context in which to promote self-reflection on the experiences and learning participants had received that have shaped their views of impactful leadership. Additionally, the participants who received coaching pointed out that the positive features of the intervention included having an opportunity to "talk things through, discuss vulnerabilities and emotions, and make mistakes; … a place to identify and affirm strengths and identify and address personal inhibitors; and an opportunity to learn and use new tools and techniques" (Simpson, 2010, p. 123).

Moreover, coaching can offer a space for leaders to be vulnerable and take risks while simultaneously receiving feedback and being challenged. These positive features were based on the foundation that coaching was used for development purposes as opposed to remedial reasons.

In addition to the positive features, the research participants were asked to identify the tangible benefits of coaching for leadership development. These benefits were increased confidence, improved personal skills, enhanced self-awareness, more considered work-life balance, better career planning, and better decision-making (Simpson, 2010, pp. 125-126). It should be noted that these benefits contribute to individual development as opposed to organizational benefits and represent a mix of inner and outer personal gains.

These coaching outcomes increase individual leader capacity; additionally, coaching has also been shown to be effective in increasing relational and collective leadership skills, including leader-follower relationships. Simpson's (2010) study identified six benefits affecting the overall organization. Participants perceived that coaching positively impacted the leadership capacity of the organization. These benefits included strengthened recruitment, better retention of good staff, better corporate working and organization development, better management of risk, better value for money, and improved overall performance (p. 127-128). These are considered business benefits that contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organization's leadership, as opposed to individual leaders.

Also looking at the relational benefits of coaching, Anthony (2016) used a transformational leadership framework to examine the effect of coaching used for

leadership development impacting the organization. Specifically, her study looked at the influence of coaching on leader engagement with direct reports including individualized consideration, delegation, and close supervision behaviors, such as micro-managing (Anthony, 2016, p. 931). Anthony (2016) used a multi-source surveying method, including self-ratings for leader coaching (e.g., have you received leadership coaching?); the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to measure individualized consideration; a six-item delegation scale for followers to assess levels of delegation; and eight-item Likert scale to measure the perception followers had of close supervision from their leaders. The study's cross-sectional sample included 75 mid-to-senior-level leaders and 188 direct reports from a large corporate organization and alumni from a public university. These sources measured the study's hypotheses that leadership coaching will be positively associated with individualized consideration and leadership delegation behaviors.

The study's results supported Anthony's (2016) hypothesis. When leaders experience coaching, they are more likely to provide their direct reports with individualized consideration to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Therefore, when leaders provide more individualized consideration, they are also more likely to delegate tasks and assignments and engage in less close supervision behaviors. Thus, Anthony (2016) found that coaching positively impacted the relationship between leaders and their direct reports.

However, Anthony (2016) acknowledged that although the study showed a positive outcome of coaching on transformational leadership behaviors, the study did not examine the coaching methods or processes leader participants may have received during the coaching experience. Therefore, additional research is called for regarding the effects

of different coaching practices or methodologies. MacKie's (2014) study addressed a similar issue in coaching research that included, up to this point, a limited number of controlled studies using a variety of methodologies and relying on self-reported outcomes. MacKie (2014) argued that this "methodological heterogeneity" made it difficult to generalize conclusions. His study, therefore, investigated specific components of coaching using a standardized strength-based coaching intervention. The study used a between-subjects control group design that included a 360-degree feedback process on 37 executive leaders from a nonprofit organization grouped into two cohorts. One cohort was placed in a coaching first group, and the other cohort was placed in a waitlist-for-coaching group. The waitlisted cohort served as the control group. The study addressed the hypothesis that leaders receiving strengths-based coaching will show a significantly greater increase in transformational leadership behavior than those on the waiting list. Additionally, when the cohort on the waiting list receives coaching, they will show a greater increase in transformational leadership behaviors compared to their pre-coaching leadership scores (MacKie, 2014, p. 122-123). The use of multi-rater feedback, both pre- and post-coaching, provided a way to measure the broader impact coaching on leadership behaviors has on the organization in addition to individual and leader and follower impact.

The study's results suggested that a structured strengths-based coaching approach to leadership development is highly effective at increasing transformational leadership behaviors. Additionally, these changes have been perceived at different organizational levels. Nevertheless, MacKie (2014) noted that although the study confirmed a positive effect of coaching on leadership development, it could not tell if a strengths-based

approach was better than others. Therefore, MacKie (2014) observed a need for more controlled trials.

These and other coaching research studies have highlighted some challenges and other considerations when using coaching as an intervention in leadership development. Simpson (2010) observed that the benefits of coaching were not "inevitable and are associated with certain features of good [coaching] practice" (p. 129). Simpson (2010) noted that participants identified the following when considering coaching a useful intervention: Having a good coach, the coachee committing to the learning, the coachee understanding coaching, the skills of the coach, easy access to the coaching, coaching being seen by all involved (coaches, coachees, stakeholders, etc.) as developmental and not remedial, and coaching would be available at several career points (p. 129). It was clear from the study that these features were necessary to ensure positive coaching results. The quality of the coaching practices, as well as the coachee's satisfaction with the coach's abilities are also important determinants of the potential positive effects of coaching on leader and leadership development. Coaching is more effective and leads to a positive experience when it is perceived by all who are involved (coach, coachee, and any sponsors) as developmental rather than remedial (Day, 2000; Simpson, 2010). Unfortunately, a stigma has been attached to coaching when it is used for disciplinary reasons.

Beyond looking at the effectiveness of coaching in leadership development, Shoukry (2016) discussed a study examining coaching as an emancipatory approach using a critical theory paradigm. Shoukry employed a cooperative inquiry, working collaboratively with twelve Egyptian coaches, who used an emancipatory coaching

model with 22 clients. Shoukry (2016) was interested in how oppression affects individuals and their experiences toward emancipation. The study highlighted the role of critical reflection and reflective workshops.

The study's findings resulted in a better understanding of living in oppressive environments, suggesting the complexity of interactions. The study provided a theoretical view of moving from oppression to emancipation. The findings highlighted the use of storytelling to externalize the coachee's experiences. The findings also highlighted the use of challenging structures that impacted the coachee's experiences of oppression and the process of fighting back, which prompted the coachee to partake in three types of actions: "breaking from the reality of daily oppression, discovering new worlds where new behaviors could be implemented, and engaging in reflective actions" (Shoukry, p. 24). Through narratives and the emphasis on reflective actions, the coaching for emancipation model centers the coachee's voices and focuses on how they tell their own stories.

Looking at the use of coaching to help teachers become more inclusive, Gallagher and Bennett's (2018) study identified a set of principles needed to address challenges and overcome obstacles inclusion coaches may encounter with coachees. The coachees were specifically teachers who were transitioning into a more inclusive service delivery model to ensure their teaching reached all students. Ultimately, through the findings, the researchers presented a set of principles for inclusive practices for coaches to use as a potential conceptual model.

Gallagher and Bennett (2018) identified a set of six principles from online written reflections of 13 inclusion coaches with experience working in elementary and high

schools. These reflections were part of a larger, mixed-methods research design, lasting for two years. Specifically, their research question included: “What principles are identified as a function of inclusion coaches’ experiences during their work with classroom teachers in the first two years as they transition into inclusive service delivery” (Gallagher and Bennett, 2018, p. 21). The inclusive education model set out to eliminate separate classrooms for students in special education.

The study resulted in identifying six themes after careful coding and analysis of the reflections, as expressed by the inclusion coaches as key tenets for supporting coachees as they redeveloped their teaching practices into a more inclusive model. The six principles identified were: 1. Pre-requisite: receptivity to coaching for inclusion; 2. Process: building trust, collaboration, and reflection; 3. Precipice: the tension between knowledge and beliefs; 4. Promotion: administrative support; 5. Proof: evidence of change, impact, and capacity building; and 6. Promise: future of the role (Gallagher & Bennett, 2018, pp. 23-24). These six principles, as Gallagher and Bennett (2018) noted, may provide a useful coaching model for coaches focused on inclusion practices.

The studies reviewed for this section examined the effectiveness of coaching on leadership development. While each of the studies showed a significant positive effect of coaching on leadership development, not one addressed DEIB issues as a potential leadership behavior or outcome that coaching in leadership development could impact. Anthony’s (2016) study measuring the possibility of coaching leaders for more effective transformational leadership behaviors, specifically to give more individualized consideration to direct reports and team members, could be linked to DEIB behaviors in certain contexts; however, the study does not directly align transformational leadership

behaviors with DEIB, such as considering identity or experiences of belongingness (or the exclusion of belongingness). Likewise, Simpson's (2010) study found that coaching provided participants with the benefits of being able to express vulnerability and discuss mistakes made. These coaching benefits could also be argued as increasing leaders' capacity to confront DEIB issues, but Simpson (2010) did not directly make this connection. Finally, Trevilion's (2018) study examined common issues for coaching as determined by both the coachee and their manager in a leadership development program. Abilities to address or communicate DEIB issues were missing as potential challenges, though research has shown that these are common areas of opportunities for leadership development. Shoukry's (2012) and Gallagher and Bennett's (2018) research did look at inclusive coaching but not in relation to leadership development, specifically building leaders' capacity to address DEIB issues. Instead, the former looked at coaching as an emancipatory tool for oppressed coachees, and the latter looked at inclusion in the context of helping teachers transition to an inclusive service model. Unfortunately, what remains unclear is the relationship between leadership coaching and its impact on developing more inclusive leaders and leadership. Leaders need to develop the competencies and mindset to lead more inclusively and better understand DEIB efforts and their impact on the organization.

Conceptual Literature of Critical and DEIB Coaching

Since the racial reckoning of 2020, the literature surrounding DEIB coaching has increased, reflecting the growing recognition of coaching as a tool for advancing critical work in organizations. This section reviews the literature on the application of coaching in contexts such as DEIB, social justice, emancipation, and moving beyond "fixing the

person," emphasizing its role in facilitating deeper reflection and action toward equity and systemic change.

Gannon (2021) explored the relationship between social movement theory and coaching and its potential value in affecting and enabling social change. Gannon (2021) identified three key themes of social movement theory and coaching and mentoring studies: Centrality of change, challenging or defending systems and practices, and networks for causes, emphasizing the role of coaching in fostering social change. In the discussion of these three themes, Gannon (2021) argued that it is critical to move beyond any notion that coaching is limited or constrained in changing systems, and she maintained that coaching has the potential to "shift powers and support agency" (p.17), seeing coaching as not a neutral practice that only works to support or reinforce the status quo rather than challenge it. Like social movement activists, coaches can reflect on their own values and causes they support and identify which issues can be challenged. Coaching can help raise awareness, spur conversations about social inequities, and gain commitment to social change. Furthermore, considering coaching and mentoring through the framework of social movement theory and seeing coaching as a proponent of social change can critically impact the education and training of coaches and mentors.

Carter et al. (2022) explored how Black women leadership coaches perceived and navigated workplace tensions and interrogated their role in providing DEIB work during the racial reckoning that occurred after the murder of George Floyd, as well as with their relationships with their clients and the organizations. Their study employed a phenomenological approach to gain insight into the Black women coaches' lived experiences. They interviewed seven participants, all of whom identified as Black women

and had a coaching practice. Carter et al. (2022) found that these coaches experienced a significant increase in coaching engagements and more frequent dialogue about DEIB during this time when organizations were reacting to the murders of black Americans. The authors found the coaches describing the tensions stemming from this historical period as “performative corporate wokeness” (Carter et al., 2022, p.12), where organizations were only going so far with DEIB to superficial levels as opposed to working towards real systemic changes.

Carter et al. (2022) also highlighted Black women's unique challenges in leadership and coaching. The coaches, they found, felt tension in serving as both advocates and supporters for others while also managing their own experiences with inequities. The tension also showed up as microaggressions and hypervisibility. This tension, the authors observed, led to an increase in emotional fatigue and burnout through having to “be ‘on’ during the racial reckoning” (Carter et al., 2022, p. 15). To navigate these challenges, the Black women coaches employed a few techniques, including “armouring,” a protective strategy for coping with hostility or racial oppression that promotes self-caring (Carter et al., 2022). This concept involves boundary setting and allows for choice or feeling as if they have choices in unsupportive environments.

Bierema, et al. (2023) critiqued postfeminist leadership development interventions, such as coaching, that are aimed at “fixing” women leaders by addressing perceived “weaknesses” and suggesting that women are somehow to blame for inequities in the workplace as opposed to discriminatory systems in place. They reviewed several coaching websites aimed at women’s leadership development using coaching as an intervention. The review showed that these coaching programs focus on what Bierema et

al. (2023) deemed the “4 C’s” of postfeminist methods used to fix women leaders: confidence, control, courage, and competition. The authors suggest these “4 C’s” perpetuate already unrealistic standards for women. Additionally, the postfeminist methods fail to challenge the systems supporting gender inequities and thus eschew feminist values. As an antidote, Bierema et al. (2023) assert a different coaching model, critical feminist coaching (CFC), based on key tenets of critical feminism they call the “4 R’s.” These include reflecting privilege, reforming structural inequities, raising consciousness, and rebuilding solidarity to promote equity and social justice (Bierema et al., 2023). The authors suggest this model takes a more critical feminist approach that would “disrupt the status quo, committed to addressing issues of power, social justice, and marginalization” (Bierema et al., 2023, p. 261) in the coaching process.

Carter (2023) pointed out that many leadership development programs do not include diversity topics, and for the ones that do, they only superficially brush on diversity leadership principles. Carter stated that an effective way to address DEIB in leadership development is through coaching. Specifically, she argued that human resources development practitioners should incorporate diversity intelligence (DQ) into coaching programs and practices for leaders. DQ is a tool to help leaders become more aware of their thinking and actions when it comes to fostering a more diverse and inclusive workplace and helping build recognition of the value of diversity. The DQ focuses on behavior patterns that may stem from different cultural backgrounds and how to integrate diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences more effectively within the organization. Moreover, Carter (2023) argues that by using a DQ coaching focus, coaches can help leaders “develop the skills they need to navigate the complexities of

diversity in the workplace, rather than simply providing them with information about diversity" (p. 296).

Conclusion

My proposed study addressed gaps in the literature by drawing on a critical HRD framework to examine how coaching has been used in leader and leadership development to enhance leaders' capabilities to advance DEIB topics in their organizations. As such, my study will critically explore the practices, methods, and processes coaches use. This study will contribute to the literature on coaching, critical HRD, and inclusive leadership development. My goal is to help human resource development researchers and practitioners effectively intervene to coach and educate leaders on how to lead skillfully and effectively DEIB initiatives and embrace the bravery, vulnerability, and accountability necessary to make sustainable changes that promote organizational justice.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how coaching is used to develop more inclusive leaders. The study was also to understand how coaches navigate the challenges and foster the success of using DEIB coaching in leadership development. The research questions included:

1. What approaches do coaches use when developing more inclusive leaders in higher education?
2. What do coaches say about the challenges and benefits of DEIB coaching for leaders?

This chapter is organized into five sections: (1) design of the study; (2) data collection; (3) data analysis; (4) researcher subjectivity; and (5) chapter summary.

Design of the Study

This study used a qualitative design guided by a critical Human Resources Development (HRD) framework. Qualitative research is based on the paradigm that reality is socially constructed, meaning that it is not an objective, concrete, or measurable phenomenon. It is constructed by how humans interact with their world and with each other and how they make sense of the meaning of those interactions (Crotty, 2003; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Prasad, 2018). An overall purpose of initiating qualitative research, according to Merriam and Simpson (2000) is to "achieve an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, to delineate the

process of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience" (p. 98). For my study, I was interested in exploring the problem of how leadership development is inadequate for developing leaders who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their communities and organizations. My research examined how HRD and learning and development professionals make sense of how they are contributing (or not contributing) to the development of more inclusive leaders. I also explored how these learning and development professionals used coaching as a leadership development tool to develop more inclusive leaders. Finally, I wanted to understand better the coaches's perceptions of the challenges and successes of DEIB coaching and how they navigated those challenges and successes.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research contains multitudes—numerous forms of inquiry, approaches, designs, and methods. Stemming from a constructionist epistemology, qualitative research helps researchers make meaning of phenomena and experiences through the idea of how reality is socially constructed and how we construct and interpret the meaning of our interactions with one another and with the world (Crotty, 2003; Mason, 2018; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, this constructed meaning-making provides researchers with an opportunity for a deeper understanding of how others make sense of their lives, why things matter or do not matter, and why or how meanings can change. Moreover, qualitative research helps researchers see patterns and connections beyond what can be measured. To conduct relevant, quality research, however, researchers engaging in a qualitative methodology

must be aware of the rigorous characteristics that make up the nature of qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described five key characteristics of qualitative research.

The first characteristic of qualitative research is to focus on meaning and understanding. Researchers base all types of qualitative methods and approaches on the key philosophical assumption that there are many realities in contrast to a positivist paradigm where there is only one measurable reality. The philosophical assumption also asserts that "reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 97). The depth of understanding of how individuals construct their realities also includes the context of the experience or phenomenon. For instance, focusing on meaning and understanding of the setting can also entail what else is happening at the moment, what other people may be involved, or what social, political, or organizational systems are enacted. There is also a needed depth of understanding of how people make sense of their experiences and contexts. The researcher, as part of the process, collects the data—both verbal utterances and non-verbal observations—and then analyzes the collected data.

The second characteristic is the understanding that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research, meaning that the primary instrument is human. The human instrument for collecting data can interact, respond, and adapt to the research participants and contexts involved (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The researcher can not only record spoken utterances during an interview, for example, but they can also note body language, such as facial expressions, stances, and posture that could indicate different layers of meaning-making. The

researcher can adapt by observing any incongruence between a participant's words and body language, inquire about it, and probe deeper by repeating a question differently to elicit a more thoughtful response. However, a disadvantage, or rather a challenge, of the researcher as a human instrument for collecting and analyzing data is that humans are subjective—we all have biases, and we come with feelings. Therefore, as a qualitative researcher, it is important to be aware of biases. The researcher can account for and monitor their biases to determine how they may influence the research process.

The third characteristic of qualitative research is that it usually involves fieldwork. The researcher will go on-site, or "in the field," to observe and collect data from and about the people they are studying. Merriam and Simpson (2000) described fieldwork as the researcher "becoming intimately familiar with the phenomenon under study, whether it be a case study of a single individual or a grounded theory of the study of a complex social interaction" (p. 98). In other words, qualitative researchers will go to the locations where the problem, experience, or phenomenon under study occurs. The environment itself can become part of the meaning-making process for the participants and provide additional data for the researcher to note.

The fourth characteristic is that data analysis in qualitative research is mostly an inductive process. An inductive process research strategy begins with the recording of the data. The researcher reads through the data—transcripts, field notes, documents, etc.—carefully looking for patterns, themes, topics, and concepts they can use as codes to then use to label and organize data. Instead of starting the research process with a hypothesis, framework, or a predetermined list of codes to use in data analysis (a deductive approach), the researcher generates a list of codes directly from the data. An inductive

approach, therefore, uses language coming directly from the research participants thus allowing the researcher to remain close to the data and "mirror" what is said to understand better the participants' meaning-making and understanding (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 263). Mirroring what the participants say by using direct words or phrases as codes helps the researcher remain open-minded and focused on staying true to the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's own perspectives. Researchers thus stay loyal to the data.

The final characteristic of qualitative research is providing rich, thick descriptions of the data, describing the participants, patterns, anomalies, surprises, and themes that arise from data analysis. As the adjective rich denotes, the written description should convey the complexities, dimensions, and layers of the data being analyzed to avoid oversimplification or reduction of meaning and interpretations. A researcher may be challenged by splitting focus on unraveling the complexities, dimensions, and layers for meaning while also tracing connections and patterns with others (Prasad, 2018). Rich description comes from rich data, and this data can come from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, field notes, documentation, pictures, and non-verbal cues from participants. Using multiple sources provides rich data to deliver the complexities, dimensions, and layers of meaning obtained from the research participants.

Therefore, a qualitative research method based on the five criteria outlined would provide the necessary tools to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspective, as opposed to a quantitative or statistical occurrence of the problem. My study would attempt to discover *how* coaching is used rather than *how often* it is used to develop more inclusive leaders. Therefore, qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate

method to achieve my research goals. Moreover, a qualitative research design offers more in-depth knowledge about the specific research topic and its participants.

Critical Theoretical Framework

While interpretive in nature, qualitative research can take a critical approach. What is meant by critical is that qualitative research design questions uncover and critique assumptions about social, cultural, and psychological influences and ways of being that can limit how we think and or be in the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Building on the interpretive model, the critical qualitative approach investigates how social aspects of a situation, power relations, and conflicting interests shape the reality experienced. Crotty (2003) suggested:

> The critical tradition, encountered today most markedly in what we know as critical theory, is even more suspicious of the constructed meanings that culture bequeaths to us. It emphasizes that particular sets of meanings because they have come into being in and out of the give-and-take of social existence, exist to serve hegemonic interests. Each set of meanings supports particular power structures, resists moves toward greater equity, and harbours oppression, manipulation and other modes of injustice and unfreedom. (p. 59-60)

Therefore, grounded in critical theories, a critical qualitative research design raises questions about power, conflict, and interests (Prasad, 2018), especially as they relate to gender, race, class, and sexuality. It also raises questions about how power relations, conflict, and interests work to advance or privilege one group while oppressing others. Indeed, critical qualitative research engages in an ongoing critique of social formations while also striving for meaningful systemic change (Prasad, 2018). Through qualitative

research, ultimately, I am seeking to understand the perspectives and experiences of learning and development professionals who coach leaders to become more inclusive leaders while also querying the context and structural conditions that frame traditional leadership development that usually leaves out DEIB training. With this in mind, I am hoping to cause a change in what is and is not included in coaching for inclusive leadership development—specifically DEIB topics— and how others perceive DEIB topics as part of leadership development.

In critical qualitative research, a theoretical or philosophical perspective frames the study, as well as focuses the research questions. I framed my proposed qualitative study using critical HRD based on critical theories. Rajchman (1987) wrote that theory "becomes an arena of authority which comprises several diverse vocabularies that can be brought to bear in describing events or trends" (p. 51). Critical theory provides a strategy and language to better understand the effect uninterrogated knowledge production and power relations can have in the learning experiences they promote and create. Therefore, I used critical HRD strategies to inform my research on how coaching is used to develop inclusive leaders. The critical strategies included (a) Challenging practices and ideological philosophies, (b) advancing alternative conceptual and theoretical models and perspectives, (c) acknowledging and questioning power dynamics, and (d) multiplying diversity and inclusion.

Participant Selection

When human subjects are involved, data collection in qualitative research begins with the participants selected for the study. For this study, I used a purposeful selection method where participants were chosen "on purpose" with the intent to elicit greater

insights and understanding of the studied phenomenon—where the most can be learned (Merriam & Simpson, 2016). This selection method allowed me to identify potential participants deliberately to provide information relevant to the research questions and purpose outlined in the dissertation.

Additionally, I used snowball sampling to help identify participants for this study. The process of snowball sampling begins by asking: "Who knows a lot about X? Whom should I talk to?" (Patton, 2002, p. 237). Starting from an initial state of small significance can build upon itself by building momentum to build a larger yield of potential cases. Using this approach, I started with a convenience-based selection. Roulston (2010) defines convenience sampling as "including participants in studies based on ease of access or ready availability" (p. 81). I leveraged my professional and personal network of learning and development professionals to share a call for research participants who can recommend others who meet the criteria for participation in the study, sending a recruitment email and placing a post on social media (AppendixA). As I am looking specifically at how coaching has been used to develop more inclusive leaders in higher education, this study's selection of research participants was guided by specific criteria to capture the relevant perspectives and experiences. Therefore, the main criteria for selecting participants included individuals who identified as learning and development professionals and who have engaged in leadership development coaching for DEIB initiatives to develop more inclusive leaders within a higher education context.

I then selected a group of participants who served as a representative segment or sample of learning and development professionals who coach or have coached in higher education. As another criterion for the study, the participants had to use coaching to

incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) training to develop more inclusive leaders. In qualitative studies, smaller samples are typically used with participants selected to provide specific information-rich data (Maxwell, 2013). I anticipated the study would have a group of five to ten participants, and I had nine participants as part of the study.

I used the Association for Talent Development's (2022) definition of a learning and development professional to identify participants as learning and development professionals. They defined a learning and development professional as someone responsible "for empowering employees' growth and developing their knowledge, skills, and capabilities" (para. 1) through functions that include training, coaching, and/or facilitating. I have identified both leadership development and DEIB initiatives because the participant should be able to speak about how leaders are developed in DEIB initiatives, as well as whether these initiatives have been part of a larger leadership development program or offered as a one-off type of training session. This experience can provide better insight into the phenomenon under study.

Once I had a pool of potential participants, I met with each one to confirm that they met the selection criteria. Once the pool was narrowed to the selected participants, I provided each one with a confirmation and consent form (Appendix D) outlining expectations of the study research and asking them to acknowledge their willingness to participate. Once confirmed, I sent the selected participants individually a welcome email that included possible dates to determine their availability and to schedule the interview.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, there are major approaches to data collection, including interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2002; Roulston, 2010). For this research study, I used an interview protocol with an interview guide (Appendix B) to conduct interviews with participants and document analysis to support the information collected from the interviews. In this section, I will discuss the data collection methods I used in my study.

Interviews

The interview is perhaps the most common method used in qualitative research as it can create the conditions for a more participatory, engaging exchange between the researcher and participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted recorded semi-structured, in-depth one-on-one interviews. I asked participants if I could use visual and audio recordings for the interviews. I gained their consent by going over a consent form (Appendix D) outlining the purpose of the research, the guiding research questions, and details of the interview process, including the ability to terminate the interview at any time. I asked for verbal consent, and all nine of the participants agreed to be recorded and interviewed. For the in-person, audio-recorded interviews, I took field notes to capture my observations of non-verbal cues. Immediately after the interviews, I recorded additional reflections in my field notes about the interview experience from my perspective as the researcher.

In qualitative research, interviewing is usually one of the primary strategies for collecting data. There are several types of questions an interviewer can ask to elicit different types of responses from participants, and asking good questions include “well-

chosen, open-ended questions that can be followed up with probes and requests for more details" (Merriam & Tisdell 2016 p. 19). Therefore, carefully considering how to word questions is crucial to asking good questions. While I have created an interview guide containing preplanned and thought-out questions (see Appendix B), I also expected to ask impromptu questions to follow up on any answers requiring more depth or to make something clearer for the participant I am interviewing, which I did. Other types of "good questions" Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended to stimulate rich responses are questions focusing on experience and behavior, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, and background (p. 118). Asking hypothetical situation questions, such as "what if?" can also uncover thoughts or perceptions. It was my goal to keep the interview as casual, flexible, and fluid as possible. I wanted to elicit the participants' vivid experiences of conducting coaching to critically further examine their methods and/or frameworks used and how they navigated their perceived challenges and maintained success in developing more inclusive leaders.

Finally, I agree with the sentiment that "knowledge and evidence are contextual, situational, and interactional" (Mason, 2018, p. 112); therefore, I also used the overall experience of the interview, noting its many dynamics and the social process, as a means of generating contextual knowledge. For instance, focusing on more situational questions rather than abstract ones can draw more social experiences or processes, such as having the participants consider the impact of identity on coaching leadership development outcomes.

Document and Resources Review

While semi-structured interviewing will be the primary data collection for this project, I planned to use document analysis to help ensure relevant data collection. Patton (2002) described documents as anything that can provide further insight when gathering and analyzing data. Further, documents can be a helpful form of data collection in terms of providing a better understanding of context and aiding in developing insights relevant to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I asked some participants if they could provide examples of materials incorporating coaching used as a DEIB strategy.

Additionally, I planned to review any documentation or artifacts participants could provide, such as looking at coaching manuals, curriculum, or other resources associated with their practice, and any level 1, 2, and 3 surveys received from the programs they were willing to share. These supplemental documents could provide further connection and support to the participants' experiences and meaning-making and provide me with a better understanding of practices not easily revealed during the interview. They could be used to prompt follow-up questions asking participants to explain something in more detail. Reviewing documents provided more insights or information relevant to the research questions.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis begins as soon as the researcher collects the data—they are simultaneous activities in which the researcher engages. Data analysis is a process of classifying and interpreting material (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and there is the possibility of obtaining an abundant amount of material; therefore, data analysis also

includes managing the data to maintain focus on the problem the research study addresses.

After each interview, I transcribed and reviewed each to ensure quality and understanding. As I reviewed the transcriptions, I used an interpretive and reflexive reading approach (Mason, 2018, p. 191). The interpretive approach allowed me to view what the data meant or represented about the experience of using coaching for inclusive leadership development. Furthermore, a reflexive reading prompted me to consider my perspective and role as a researcher and learning and development professional who also uses coaching as a learning intervention. I wrote reflections after the interview and review to be intentional about considering my perspective and researcher role. Additionally, as part of the data analysis, I coded the transcribed data with comments to start to identify thematic elements, patterns, and any surprises between the interviews and documents reviewed before and after the interviews.

When it comes to data analysis, it is important to look at and think about the data from multiple angles. Looking at and thinking about data using both deductive and inductive reasoning can help the researcher consider different approaches to coding. For example, by using an inductive strategy, I generated a list of codes directly from the data and used language that comes from my research participants, thus allowing me to stay close to the data and "mirror" what is said to understand better the participants and their experiences (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). By also using a deductive strategy for coding, I approached the data analysis with an idea of what could be generated from the research questions and the critical HRD theoretical base I have chosen to use for the research project. The codes therefore could have a better focus and reflect what is

"known to be important in the existing literature" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 264). There are advantages and disadvantages to inductive and deductive reasoning approaches to coding, so a blended approach of both, or abduction, is the strategy I used for my study. Abduction allows for a "cycling back and forth between data and theory" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 264) and gives the researcher the chance to be guided by the theory yet remain open to any differences or surprises the data give. Applying abduction coding techniques presents more possibilities with analysis. Instead of trying to make data fit into categories, the data is speaking for itself. It also opens more connections with other points of data gained from different areas of the study.

In addition to using an abduction approach to code the data and look for themes, I employed a discourse analysis. There are different approaches to discourse analysis stemming from how discourse is understood. For example, discourse analysis can stem from different branches, considering discourse from linguistics and discourse from a critical poststructuralist, philosophical analysis (Maclure, 2003). From a critical poststructuralist approach, sometimes referred to as a Foucauldian approach, discourse analysis is not focused on revealing the truth or some grand meaning behind discourse. Instead, the focus is on how certain things are produced and under what conditions aid in making meaning of them. Freeman (2016) stated the task is "to examine possible enunciations that could be made on a particular subject, why it is that certain statements emerged to the exclusion of all others, and what function they serve" (p. 62). The key here is to examine what function certain statements serve as opposed to finding one grand Truth or meaning, and what is being said about a subject within certain contexts. Certain statements's function could be a production of knowledge that occurs within a specific

context. Here, it is important to understand what context means as it relates to this discourse analysis approach. Andrelchick (2016) stated that context consists of three factors: "(1) physical location … (2) a common and shared understanding of those involved in the conversation … and (3) the common evaluation by those involved" (p. 137). Another contextual layer to consider is the ideology of the person doing the utterances. Therefore, an analysis would not focus solely on the language and/or utterances of a text but also an analysis of the location, who else is involved, and what are the beliefs and fears in which an individual exists—on how and under what conditions it is being produced.

One method of discourse analysis that considers this way of analyzing text is known as generous reading. Based on the work of Bakhtin and Vološinov, generous reading uses a set of tools to locate discourse within a specific context (Andrelchik, 2016). These tools also help critically examine the text to help make sense of the discourse. Additionally, these tools can aid in making connections between the examined passage, the context in which it had been spoken or written, and the larger issue.

Again, discourse analysis and generous reading address how power and knowledge are produced under certain contexts and eschew truth-seeking and objectivity. From this approach, my inquiry explored how learning and development professionals incorporate DEIB initiatives in leadership development, especially through coaching.

Trustworthiness

There is a concern for research to demonstrate quality and reliability; however, there is much discussion on how to describe and approach trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As noted previously, qualitative

research contains multitudes and relies on subjective data that can contain multiple truths and meanings that are socially constructed as humans experience the world and create meaning from those experiences. Therefore, these subjective differences and constructed meanings require the qualitative researcher to take ethical measures to ensure trustworthiness and reliability when collecting and analyzing data. Indeed, these can be relative and therefore should "be assessed about the purposes and circumstances of the research" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 121). In other words, the qualitative researcher must consider the complexities involved in the investigated phenomenon and present a holistic interpretation that captures the perspectives of those involved in the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are several suggested methods to ensure trustworthiness and quality (Creswell, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The strategies I used included triangulation, thick description, respondent validation, and peer reviews.

Triangulation is a common method to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. Maxwell (2013) described triangulation as using different methods for collecting different sources of data as a check on one another, seeing if methods and sources "with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 139). In addition to crosschecking, using multiple methods and sources can also reveal different aspects of the studied phenomena. For my study, I planned to look at different sources of data, observation or field notes, and interviews as a way to crosscheck and confirm findings, as well as to consider the complexities and contexts involved in participants' meaning-making.

Using rich, thick descriptions also ensures trustworthiness in research by enhancing the possibility of reader generalizability. Thick, rich descriptions provide

details of the setting, participants, and the researcher's findings of the study. These details and descriptions can help readers determine similarities between their particular situation and the study. Ultimately, I am committed to the purpose of this research influencing leadership development design to use coaching as a strategy to develop more inclusive leaders through my published research and by making findings available for practitioners.

The next strategy I used was respondent validation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described respondent validation as a process where the research "solicit[s] feedback on preliminary or emerging findings" from the people the research interviewed (p. 246). This method of validation can rule out any misinterpretations or misrepresentations of the participants' meanings and intentions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stressed, "Although you may have used different words . . . Participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation" (p. 246). Validating with participants can also illuminate potential researcher biases that may have influenced captured findings. I also did respondent checks throughout the process to fine-tune how I captured the participants' perspectives and meaning-making.

Researcher Subjectivity

In qualitative research, the researcher needs to consider her subjectivity, or position, regarding the research being studied. Critical self-reflection and monitoring of assumptions or potential biases are essential to designing a valid and reliable study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the main instrument for data collection for my study, I do have a responsibility to address any personal biases, and I recognize that I bring a unique perspective and subjectivity that affects the research but also makes it personal.

I am a learning and development professional specializing in leadership development and using coaching to help transfer learning and affect changes in mindsets and behavior. I also have facilitated courses concerning DEIB initiatives, such as Safe Space and Trans 101, both of which trained faculty and staff in issues Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) staff, students, and faculty face at my institute of higher education. I have a strong desire to understand better how adults learn, as well as a drive to develop others to be more effective through coaching. Additionally, I have extensive experience as a leader of people, programs, and strategy.

I also identify and live my life as a queer, white, cis-gendered woman, and I strive to show up as an ally for historically excluded people. In my 20-year career as a learning and development professional, I have observed both dismal and great results with DEIB training for leaders. As these results varied, so did the attitudes toward and the approaches to DEIB training from organizational leaders and learning and development professionals. Many attitudes and approaches stemmed from the "it's not my responsibility" mindset and some from a "DEIB is too confrontational" belief. I have experienced how these attitudes impacted overall morale and psychological safety for others and myself. As such, my study holds professional, personal, and intellectual significance for me.

As a queer, cis-gendered learning and development professional and leader whose present research focuses on how other learning and development professionals use coaching to develop more inclusive leaders, I face certain challenges, dilemmas, and other intersecting factors. I have an obvious vested interest in the subject matter through the lenses of my intersecting identities; however, I am also committed to conducting

research that is objective and rigorous and will, therefore, tend to researcher reflexivity. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted reflexivity is understood as an "awareness of the influence the researcher has on what is being studied and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher" (p. 64). This awareness also includes how the research participants and I relate to each other and how they perceive me.

Moreover, this awareness extends to certain assumptions I am likely to have about the study and the learning and development professionals I would interview. Merriam et al. (2001) pointed out that all researchers will begin their research with certain assumptions about the topic and people they are studying. As a learning and development professional, I recognize my "insider" status in the context of this research. I have extensive experience in leadership development and understand the language and processes of learning and development. However, as a researcher, I am also an "outsider," in that I have a duty to be as objective as possible.

Other assumptions stemming from insider/outsider status also include the amount of access and shared meaning that will be granted: "The more one is like the participants in terms of culture, gender, race, socio-economic class, and so on, the more it is assumed that access will be granted, meaning shared, and validity of findings assured" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 406). As a researcher, I will need to critically address my assumptions about participants and the ease of building rapport based on the commonality of experience. In other words, I cannot assume that a shared experience of practicing as a learning and development professional who also coaches will automatically ensure rapport, trust, and understanding with my participants. Our cultural and social identities also impact our

experiences and thus will influence our interaction as we engage together in the discovery of their meaning-making.

I strived to be cognizant of differing experiences, especially those of coaches of color who feel an unfair and disproportionate burden of labor falls on them to do DEIB work. I also want to critically assess my own biases and assumptions when analyzing the experiences of white coaches and how they negotiate issues of race when coaching other white people and leaders of color.

Power

Just as I used power as part of the critical HRD framework to analyze the data, I must also turn to the topic of power and the power-based dynamics between the research participants and me as the researcher. My intention with the participants was to keep them in mind as partners in uncovering their experiences and meaning-making. Merriam and Simpson (2000) claimed participants take on the role of colleagues in the research process and are equal to the researcher who is integrated into the community (p. 126). However, while this equity is important to keep in focus, it is also important to not take it for granted. Power structures are always there and the researcher must always be aware of them during the study. Johnson-Bailey (1999) stated the researcher must be cognizant of the "balance of dialogue, research agendas, and societal hierarchies . . . each interview is a special unit of work unto itself" (p. 668). It is also true of maintaining the integrity of the data resulting from those interviews. While I will do my best effort to be mindful of setting up claims as multiple truths—truths of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making—when writing descriptions and analyzing the data, my decisions

on what to include or exclude can be seen as arbitrary acts of power (Merriam et al., 2001).

Conclusion

This chapter summarized the methodology of the study. This study aimed to understand how learning and development professionals use coaching to develop more inclusive leaders. In particular, this study was interested in how coaching has been used to impact leaders' capacity to be brave and vulnerable when it comes to creating meaningful change around DEIB initiatives. Matters regarding the design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, and researcher subjectivity were discussed. I introduced this study as a critical qualitative study using critical HRD as a theoretical lens, interviewing as a data collection method, and discourse analysis as a method of data analysis. Qualitative research is the most appropriate method for my study because of its goal to help the researcher examine and understand the phenomenon of the lived experiences of its participants. Moreover, it allows the researcher to be critical, where the aim is to challenge assumptions and the status quo and reveal issues of power and conflicting interests. To collect data, I employed a criteria-based, purposeful sampling and snowball method to recruit participants. I used individual semi-structured interviews and documents as collected data. The data was analyzed continuously using an abductive approach. I also applied discourse analysis to gain a more profound, contextual understanding of the data. Finally, my subjectivity as a researcher was discussed, and I engaged in a continual self-reflection process to monitor my biases and assumptions and how they impact the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how coaching is used in leadership development to influence leaders' ability to advance DEIB in organizations, or in other words, to develop more inclusive leaders. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How has coaching been used as a DEIB intervention for leadership development in higher education organizations?

2. What do coaches say about the challenges and success of using coaching to develop leaders who are more competent with DEIB?

In this qualitative study, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to conduct interviews with a sample of nine learning and development professionals who have used coaching for inclusive leader development to help leaders be better prepared to address and foster diversity, equity, and belonging in higher education and other organizations. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the research participants, discuss the data analysis, and present the findings and themes related to the research questions for this study.

Participant Overview

This study sample included nine participants, representing a diverse range in race, age, sex, and years of experience coaching DEIB. A semi-structured interview technique guided the interviews (Appendix B). Each one-on-one interview lasted for an average of

one hour where two were in-person interviews and seven were conducted using Zoom. Before beginning each interview, I provided the participants with a copy of the consent letter and asked them to review it (Appendix D). Once they consented to participate in the study, I asked for permission to record. Once I started recording, I explained that they could stop participating in the interview at any time.

Participants were first asked a series of questions related to their demographics, including gender, race, age, and years of experience coaching. Eight out of the nine participants identified as women. Over half of the participants (five participants) are black, and the remaining (four participants) are white. To protect participant identity, I used ranges for age and years of experience coaching. The ages ranged from the 40s to 60s, and the years of experience using coaching to develop DEIB competencies and capacity for leaders ranged from 1-5 years to 20-30 years.

All participants worked in learning and development and have used coaching focusing on DEIB for leadership development in higher education. Five of the participants currently worked at either a public or private institute of higher education when interviewed and served as internal coaches for DEIB leadership development. Four of the participants no longer worked for higher education when interviewed; however, those four participants have either served as internal coaches or continued to serve as external coaches for leadership development for private and public institutions of higher education clients.

Four of the participants have trained other coaches in DEIB-specific methods in addition to coaching clients. To further protect participant identity, pseudonyms are used in place of actual names, either of the participants's choosing or, if they had no

preference, I assigned one to them. The first question in each interview prompted the participants to talk about themselves and their backgrounds using coaching for DEIB leadership development (See Appendix B). Table 4.1 is a summary of participant demographics.

Table 4.1

Participant Profile Summaries

Participant	**Gender**	**Age Range**	**Race**	**Education**	**Years experience as a coach**	**Internal or External Coach**
Alex	Woman	40 – 50	White	Ph.D.	1 - 10	External
Bachar	Man	40 – 50	Black	BA	1 - 10	Internal
Beth	Woman	50 – 60	Black	Ed.D.	10 - 20	External
Janja	Woman	40 – 50	Black	Ph.D.	10 - 20	Internal
Lynn	Woman	50 – 60	White	Ph.D.	20 - 30	External
Petra	Woman	60 – 70	Black	JD	10 - 20	Internal
Royal	Woman	60 – 70	White	MBA	1 - 10	Internal
Sally	Woman	50 – 60	White	MA. Ed	1 - 10	Internal
Willow	Woman	40 – 50	Black	MA	1 - 10	External

Overview of the Analysis Process

Using a qualitative research methodology, I began the analysis by reviewing each interview along with any notes or observations I made during the interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data analysis is the process of making sense of the data

that includes the “interpreting, reducing, and consolidating of,” as well as moving back and forth between what participants said and what the researcher observed and noted (p. 202). The data analysis process I followed included transcribing and reviewing each interview, performing three phases of reviewing and coding the data, and generating categories and themes.

For the recorded Zoom interviews, I used the Zoom transcription feature. For the recorded in-person interviews, I used MediaSpace's transcription services. After each interview was transcribed, I reviewed the file for accuracy and made necessary edits to convey what the participants said accurately. For instance, if the transcription service incorrectly used DEEB instead of DEIB, I edited the document to DEIB. I initially used ATLAS.ti.24 qualitative data analysis software for document management and coding, but then transferred coding to an Excel spreadsheet and used notecards.

I performed three rounds of coding the data. I applied an in vivo, also known as inductive, approach to identifying “patterns or themes within qualitative data without entering the analysis with preconceived analytical categories” (Patton, 2002, p. 551). When a researcher uses in vivo coding, she uses the literal words or language from the participants in the study as codes (Saldana, 2021). Using in vivo coding allowed me, as the researcher, to approach the data with an open mind and to be as objective as possible to uncover unexpected categorical or thematic possibilities. For the first round of coding, I used an open, line-by-line approach to look for patterns and themes expressed by the participants. In this first round of coding, I identified 216 different codes, conveying multiple aspects, including participants’ answers, perceptions, and ideas. This first round

of coding provided initial insights into possible themes and connections between data points.

During the second round of coding, I decided to review hard copies of the transcripts to highlight relevant text and identify repeating ideas as expressed by different participants, thus coding in short fragments or chunks of data. I compared these second-round codes with the codes I identified in the first round in order to create more focused tentative categories and identify possible themes and connections. This method of constant comparing and connecting data helps the researcher build a grounded theory to make sense of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this round of coding, the method helped me to combine and collapse codes, thus yielding 152 codes.

In the third round of coding, I employed the axial coding process to help focus more on the data and to distinguish between the more dominant codes and less important codes (Saldana, 2021). Axial coding "extends the analytic work from initial coding, and to some extent, focused coding" (Saldana, 2021, p. 308). This approach led to refined categories and themes, resulting in three sections and 13 categories and themes.

Throughout the process, I used analytic memos to help me think through the codes and patterns I generated. Analytic memo writing is a way for the researcher to document reflections on their "coding processes and code choices, how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories … and concepts in [the] data" are taking shape and leading to meaning-making (Saldana, 2021, p. 58). I also used memo writing as a reflective tool to deepen my understanding, focus on what was emerging for me, and help refine the results. Additionally, I found that in some cases, writing these memos aided me as the researcher in questioning some of my code choices

and prompted me to seek more evidence to either prove or dispute hunches about connections and patterns.

Results

This data analysis process generated themes that addressed the research questions and yielded insights into coaches' skills and approaches in developing more inclusive leaders. It also revealed what coaches say are the challenges and benefits of using coaching to develop DEIB competencies and readiness in leaders. This section discusses the results, supported by verbatim excerpts from the participants' interviews (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Summary of Findings

Sections	Themes and Categories
Coaching strategies and methods used for DEIB development	1. Create a safe space a. Suspend judgment b. Practice empathy 2. Explore the "Why" behind DEIB 3. Use Assessments 4. Expand leaders' intercultural awareness a. Using storytelling and history 5. Focus on leader impact and power
Navigating challenges and establishing boundaries for successful DEIB coaching	6. A growth mindset is needed 7. Coaching makes DEIB training relevant 8. Managing resistance and safety
Reflexivity and continuous self-development for DEIB coaches	9. Coaches build self-awareness and recognize personal biases 10. Engage in ongoing self-development

Dynamic Coaching Strategies and Methods for DEIB Coaching

This study's first findings address how coaching has been used as part of DEIB leader development. The participants discussed what effective strategies and methods had been used when coaching for DEIB. The data revealed that coaches must incorporated dynamic, responsive strategies and methods to prepare leaders better to lead DEIB efforts in their organizations. Coaches used techniques to suspend judgment and demonstrated empathy and compassion to create a safe space for leader clients to practice vulnerability and embrace uncomfortable conversations. Coaches also incorporated the use of history and stories to expand leaders' intercultural awareness. Additionally, coaches worked to build awareness of the leaders' impact and power on teams and the organization. Coaches also helped leaders understand and express the "why" behind DEIB and its importance to organizations, and finally, coaches used assessments.

Creating a Safe Space

Each participant in the study stressed the importance of creating a safe space for leaders with whom they were coaching. The reasons for this approach included exploring deeper issues, helping the leader to be vulnerable, and engaging in uncomfortable conversations. They pointed out that DEIB topics can evoke strong emotional responses, and if coaching clients do not feel safe, it can turn into resistance and defensiveness. The research participants described that creating conditions where leader coaching clients feel safe discussing and practicing skills related to promoting DEIB was critical for progress. For example, Royal described how ensuring a safe space facilitates learning and growth in DEIB:

If you want people to be courageous and develop new skills and apply new skills

> in the DEIB space, you got to give them a safe place to experiment, and coaching is that place. You can't just send somebody through a training program or back into their work unit and say, 'oh, here you go,' and they don't have any type of support. So I, this is going to be a strong statement, but I will say DEIB training is not you can't expect for it to be effective unless you offer that space to be able to apply and learn and grow and it's safe and they have someone they can bounce ideas off of because you're not going to go back and do that with your boss. I mean, you're just not going to.

Royal continued to point out that when coaches provide support and guidance for leaders to fail, they will continue practicing difficult conversations when returning to the workplace, where the leader coaching client may feel they do not have this type of support. She noted:

> When you're talking about DEIB skills, it's kind of scary just to go back and like without any type of guidance or safe space to check yourself . . . You're probably gonna say the wrong thing at some time and getting over that fear of saying the wrong thing and knowing how to handle it.

In her experience using coaching in an inclusive leadership development program, she had found that leaders will sometimes give up practicing DEIB skills if they attempt those learned skills and fail without the practice of failing in a safe space: "If it may be difficult to go back and do that with your team, or you may try doing that with your team and you may feel like it blows up. Then where do you go? Who do you talk to? Like, how do you move past? Because then people are just going to shut down and say, 'Well, I tried it and it didn't work.'"

Petra also emphasized the value of coaches creating the space where leaders feel safe to discuss failure: “My job as the coach is to just create a space where they can talk about that. Right? They know when something’s not going well. The problem is most times without a coach they don’t have, or a good coach, they don’t have the space to talk about that [they] messed up.” Both Royal and Petra described that when coaches focus on creating a space where leader coaching clients feel safe to make mistakes, ask difficult questions, and challenge behaviors without shame, it facilitates learning and coaching then supports the learning journey.

Sally noted, however, that even in this safe space of coaching, it can be difficult for leaders to open up: “The uncomfortable part comes for a lot of people is like, I don’t know if I want to talk about this. Not necessarily because I don’t want you to hear it. . . I have to admit something to myself that maybe I haven’t verbalized.” To help leader clients overcome this trepidation, Petra recommended that coaches need to be present with their clients to help them go deeper:

> But it is noticing. Right. Part of what you're noticing when you're present and you're taking in you're noticing all of that. All of the indicators that you're getting for a person and whether or not you know. But you always ask. Right. You get permission. Would you like to go deeper? That sounds like it might be someplace juicy to explore. Are you gamed? And sometimes a lot of times the answer is yeah sure. You know.

For Petra, being present when prompting leader coaching clients to “go deeper” involves being actively engaged with them in an attentive way. She described active listening, where she is attentive to both the verbal and non-verbal cues the client is giving. Further,

she described how she is attentive to the client's reactions, noting any discomfort, and then asking permission whether or not the client wishes to process and move forward.

Janja echoed Sally and Petra in that when coaching is used with training, it can provide support in practicing conversations the leader may perceive as too difficult to have without support. She stated that:

> Integrating coaching with training is I think spot on. I think that is spot on. It's an effective way to train our leaders to have difficult conversations in a way that may not feel like it's a difficult conversation, because if you feel like it [could be] a difficult conversation, like a lot of times, it really doesn't have to be. But the integrating coaching with the skills set, I think that's definitely an effective way to really help.

Willow stated that to make this safe space more effective for DEIB work, you must sometimes challenge the leader to explore that discomfort and to help them with vulnerability:

> I think as a society and as a professional community, we have gotten really good at the song and dance. We have gotten really good at figuring out how to do the work of learning the buzzwords. We again are really good at doing the work of mimicking the concerned looks, but we've also got really good at making sure that no one is uncomfortable and that no one is truthful and that no one is vulnerable and so what I appreciate about the coaching space is it brings those pieces back into a discussion that is supposed to be uncomfortable, a discussion that is supposed to evoke some sense of vulnerability.

Willow discussed how leaders and others in organizations tend not to engage in DEIB topics because not only do they fear failure but also making others feel uncomfortable or angry, especially when beliefs are challenged. For Willow, creating a space in coaching that encourages discomfort and vulnerability acknowledges it as normal and valuable and a part of learning and change.

Four other participants also discussed vulnerability as an element related to safe spaces in coaching, especially when reflecting on one's own behavior. Bachar described what being vulnerable meant to his practice and how it benefited the leader coachee:

> Really, it's essential to me because if you if you're not willing to really hear the, you know, the bad and the ugly, you know those are things that you can't see about yourselves. So we all have blind spots. And so, to me, vulnerability means that you're open to receiving things that you can't see about yourself. We all have them and sometimes we don't like to hear it. We probably get very defensive, but once we kind of see other people's perspectives and we kind of take ownership, then that's where we can kind of move the needle. So to me, I think vulnerability is essential to move forward. If you don't have it, you can't really move forward.

What is key for Bachar is that when leaders are vulnerable, they can move forward and take ownership of changing behaviors that are not inclusive or promote DEIB initiatives. Petra also shared similar experiences with vulnerability being essential in developing more inclusive leaders. She stated:

> So from my own experience, I can tell you . . . you know sometimes it's a little scary because you gotta get down in the vulnerability of your life and your experience and what's going on. But if you lean into it, it helps me make better

> decisions as I am moving through my day as I am tackling big issues as I am having to lead other people and relate to them. How am I gonna make or break this relationship? When you're being coached these things come up in the coaching process.

For Petra, vulnerability is connected to helping leaders make better decisions and how those decisions can impact others. Being vulnerable in this context contributes to deeper understanding and connection with others for leaders. In the next section, I will focus on the two common themes related to how participants created safe spaces when coaching DEIB.

Suspend Judgment

All nine participants stated the importance of suspending judgment as a coach when creating these safe spaces for leaders to be vulnerable and engage in conversations with which they find uncomfortable. Janja insisted that suspending judgment is a key coaching skill involving the ability to "listen intently and actively," though she acknowledged how difficult this skill is. Alex also indicated it can be difficult to suspend judgement. Her approach is to focus on the leader's growth:

> So we really frame it in terms of growth and development. It's not punitive. It's like I said, it's not a value judgment and there's no judgment attached to where you are on the continuum, even though secretly I might be sort of like, wow, you're in denial like, you know.

While Alex admits that it can be difficult to suspend judgment, she accomplishes it in the session by focusing on the learning and growth of her leader-coaching client. Similar to Alex, Petra and Beth also acknowledged the difficulty in suspending judgment, especially

when values and beliefs may be different. Petra discussed using self-reflection to help her overcome this difficulty:

> This is DEIB, of course, but it's being open to the fact that we are human first and foremost. Like you coach from that standpoint. So it doesn't, I'm not judging. Hard to do because we're taught to judge. But I have to really prepare myself to coach and I really have to think about who's in front of me, what might their experiences be.

Here, Petra recognized that for coaches to suspend judgment, it helps to remember the human side of coaching and focus on the fact that lived experiences are different from one person to another. Petra taps into her self-awareness to affirm these differences in experiences. Beth echoed the point that acknowledging differences is essential in helping a coach suspend judgment:

> But even in the middle of a coaching session, being able to hold yourself, hold yourself steady and be steady in water, suspend judgment and coach across difference, you must suspend judgment. You have not experienced the world in the way that other person has, even if you are white and a man. There's still so much more than being white and male. There is gender, sexual orientation, geographic location because Midwest, East, Midwest, all of them behave differently. So when you think of culture, language and education, that's just the top, the surface below the surface, right? It's like the details and I think that level of insights as a coach helps you be one, amazing, and two, it's a gift you give to your clients because they feel you're creating a safe space.

For Beth and Petra, this “holding yourself steady,” helps the coach to focus on listening and understanding one’s experience rather than criticizing it. Suspending judgment to create a space for sharing can reduce defensiveness and resistance to DEIB. It also allows space for complexity, enabling a richer coaching experience to facilitate learning.

Other participants had discussed that ensuring clients that you will not openly judge them can be difficult to do, especially in cases where the leader may or may not know what to expect in DEIB coaching. In this case, Beth stressed:

> You know, Rachel, I tell a client before they start working with me, this is the kind of coach I am. I give homework, I use direct communications, I will do everything I can to create a safe environment for you. I, although I'm a Black woman, I do not have your lived experience. I want you to know there's nothing you can say that will cause a division between us because I am prepared for this opportunity to move you or to help you move into the direction you want to go. But if I know that and I can say that, some people will be like, whoa, and then I'm creating a safe space, I'm stating it. Now, there are still that choice on whether they trust it, but if I keep showing up consistently and suspending judgment and using the right approach, you can get where you need to be.

For Beth, she actively ensured clients that she will do what she can to create a space where they would not feel judged. She recognized that it takes consistency and modeling non-defensiveness for clients by acknowledging differences and building trust.

Practice Empathy and Compassion

Practicing empathy was another common element between the participants when it came to creating safe spaces for the leader clients. Empathy is necessary to support

leaders in vulnerability and discomfort. Petra advised, “Call on empathy as necessary to affirm people, to celebrate the successes that they’ve had, the things that they have achieved. And to kind of walk with them down the path a little ways.” Similarly, Lynn discussed empathy as a crucial skill in aligning with clients’ current needs and experiences: “We can’t even begin to meet clients where they are unless we are able to understand where they are and you be there with them. And so I think empathy is critical.” When coaches can connect with clients and engage with them at their current level, it fosters a space more conducive to constructive challenge and growth. Lynn continued to say in the interview that clients are more responsive to being challenged when coaches demonstrate empathy in their approach. Lynn stated:

> Challenge clients in a way that they're receptive to it. Right. And so that then touches on the empathy. Right. So how is this client? How do they need to be challenged? Sometimes you’ll have a client who, you know, probably they've already told me if you know I need to be told what to do. You need to tell me if you think I'm not taking this seriously enough for diving deeper or whatever, and then others who you know if you, if I challenge them that hard, they'd be offended and they need to be guided more than directly challenged. So I think there's a there's a skill there in both knowing what that client needs and being able to do it. And we don't, we're not always able to be, you know, both ends of the continuum if you will.

This approach of showing empathy offers a means to balance the challenge of encouraging clients to engage more deeply while meeting them where they are—on the clients’ terms and stage of development. In addition to Lynn, Sally and Petra both

stressed that employing empathy enables the coach to use curiosity and suspend judgment to help move clients' progress and mindset around DEIB. Sally remarked, for example, that empathy is essential for her own approach to DEIB coaching:

> I see [coaching] as a form of empathetic work that makes me a better human being, and being able to coach with empathy is at the heart of DEIB work that I've done. It's at the heart of inclusive leaders. My whole experience, you know, it was about empathy, leading with curiosity about people instead of assuming and making judgment, and coaching is a way to do that because of the structure of coaching.

In comparison, Petra shared that she often reflects on her own experience as a leader to help engage with the client while using curiosity to help guide progress. She remarked:

> Yeah. I don't know how they got there, but that's where they are. And so I don't, you know it's okay. It's like I'm not making them wrong for that becomes the practice in DEIB. It is that's where they are. I don't expect everyone to be where I am. I am amazed. It's like a miracle every day, like that I'm here and where I am, you know what I mean? It's like okay. So, you know and a lot of times I can reflect back to that moment where I was a leader who may have struggled in that same space. It might not look like [how] theirs looks, but I've been stuck before in thinking about something, knowing something, being a know-it-all. I have been there. I am not proud of those moments. Theirs happens to be in this space around DEIB or it's a stereotype. It happens to be in this moment because that's what they know. Now my thought becomes hmm, what would it be like if they weren't? Right, so I have to get curious enough to, what would it be like, my goodness,

> what would it be like if they had a breakthrough? And so it helps them— to stay in the moment with them.

Here, Petra describes using empathy and her own understanding as a leader to better connect with the coaching client. This connection helps her become curious about how the leader can progress in their capacity for DEIB work.

Understanding the "Why" Behind DEIB

The data established that guiding leaders to examine and understand why DEIB is important and valuable is pivotal to their effective engagement in DEIB work. The participants provided several examples of how understanding the “why” is pivotal in motivating leaders. Janja, for example, stated that this technique was most impactful and what she describes as transformational in her DEIB coaching:

> And really understanding and helping the person understand the why behind what it is that they're doing, and in a lot of cases, especially when it comes to the DEIB, we don't think about our whys. We only think about either what has happened to us or what we have done, but really understanding that the transformation is in the why and that skill of helping people get to the why that's what made the difference.

In her experience, Janja found that guiding her coaching clients to understand and articulate the why behind DEIB led to behavior change. Guiding clients to know and articulate the reasons why DEIB is important to teams and in organizations is a key coaching skill for DEIB work. Lynn also described this as a key skill. She discussed how engaging her clients in discussing why inclusive organizations are important can foster motivation for leaders. Lynn stated:

> Some time has to be spent with them, getting their heart, really, but it sort of starts with the head, into understanding the importance of inclusive and equitable organizations, cultures, etcetera. And creating the sort of the motivational pull. So that they really do want to do the work that it takes, and so whether it's coaching or facilitation, that's got to be a grounded part of it.

For Lynn, helping leaders understand why inclusive leadership is important in the organization creates motivation. It also helps leaders recognize their role in contributing to DEIB initiatives, thus creating a sense of purpose. Other participants have also found that when getting their clients to examine the purpose or the why behind what they want to focus on, it can change the client's focus in the coaching sessions. For example, Janja explained:

> So though again back to the why. So this is what I wanna do. This is how I know that I've done it and this is why it matters, and it's quite often when people speak to the why it does happen that they'll change what they wanna focus. People will come to a coaching session with one particular like this is the outcome that I think I need, but when they really think about why is this important, they realize I need something else because this is why it's important.

Royal shared similar experiences in her coaching practice: "When you start asking about meaning, you might get a whole different thing that comes out of that, and then you drive in towards an outcome." Both Royal and Janja indicated that discussing meaning with clients often prompts them to recognize that they may need a different focus.

This recognition within themselves about “the why” can also stem from when clients align the meaning with their own values, prompting deeper reflection about purpose. Royal pointed this out in her interview. She stated:

> You asked somebody about their values and they just start crying and then like nobody ever asked me that before. I've never thought about that, and then they come back afterwards to a subsequent coaching session to say after you ask me about my values, I started to think and these are the changes that I'm making in me in relation to that, and like people see themselves from a whole different perspective after that happens and I hesitate to share specific situations because they're so personal.

Willow also worked with clients to align meaning with values. She described helping clients understand how this alignment is used to help shift perspectives. She stated, “The goal of the work is for you to see that it if we're looking at an anti-oppressive perspective, that's the goal and that there is a value system that's attached to growing and sustaining an anti-oppressive perspective or an anti-oppressive leadership strategy.” For Willow and Royal, helping clients examine the meaning of DEIB work, as well as aligning it to a value system, is instrumental in encouraging leaders to engage in uncomfortable reflection and recognize when their values conflict with their behaviors. The participants in this study discussed that this technique was foundational in helping to create more sustained learning and meaningful behavior change in DEIB leader development.

Use Assessments

Another key finding identified is the role of assessments in DEIB coaching. Most participants used assessments to provide key data points to help inform themselves and

the leader of potential gaps or areas of unawareness and to incorporate different perceptions of the leaders' abilities in DEIB work. Beth, for instance, strongly recommended using different types of assessments for a holistic approach for coaching:

> Any coach who is participating in one-on-one coaching have some type of assessment that they would use with their client, even if they're, you know, if they use this for personality or they use strength finders. I mean, there's so many things that could allow someone to become more self-aware. Um, but the variety is important because personality is one thing. Behavior is something else. And we're talking about behavior in coaching your personality. I mean, we can have a conversation about how you show up in your, if you're funny or not funny, if you're introvert, non-introvert, you know, that's different than how you behave, how you engage with people based on your biases, your fears, those types of things.

For Beth, using a variety of assessments provides a more well-rounded view of a client's behavior, mindset, strengths, and potential areas for development. She recommended both personality and behavioral assessment types for DEIB coaching. Moreover, Beth continued to explain how in her coaching experience, assessments allowed her to identify specific gaps where she could ensure the DEIB leader development is relevant to the client and the organization. She explained:

> The assessment reveals where the pain points in the organization and, you know, very wide range of things. The executive leadership decide, okay, based on everything we received, this is what we want to work on regarding behavior. Then we design a training plan. Then everyone in the leadership position gets executive

> coaching one-on-one. After executive coaching, we do a reassessment on seeing how we move the needle. So Rachel, just like you would normally see in anything else, you know, you want a current state and a future state. So you, you definitely want to coach the gap because you can't go walking in and say, okay, this is a one-size-fits-all. This is how we're going to do it. No, we need a diagnosis. I need to understand like what's going on here because it's not a one-size-fits-all because in every company, there are going to be individuals who don't feel like they belong in a very specific demographic.

Beth emphasized that DEIB coaching is not a one-size-fits-all approach—it involves a more tailored approach to be more effective. Using assessments, for Beth, allows her to provide a customized approach, allowing her to coach to the specific gap the assessment may reveal. Beth offered an example:

> So in our case, the wins are when I can narrow down an assessment and say, women between the ages of 25 and 35 in the marketing department feel this way, right? And so when you get it to that, there's meaning they don't feel like there are access to opportunity. If they say that access to opportunity is limited and the score is low, then leadership says, wait, this is very interesting. Why would all of them feel that way? Well, now we have a leader over that that has now awareness. And the question to the leader is, this is where the executive coaching comes in. What do you want to do about it? Here it is. What do you want to do about it? And how are you going to approach it? And what skills do you need to level up so you can approach it?

Beth's experience suggests that using assessments is an effective responsive strategy to ensure that DEIB coaching is relevant and addresses specific situations to ensure actual behavior change. Moreover, it shows how assessments are used as a strategy to measure the impact of DEIB coaching on the organization.

Similarly, Alex also used assessments to help measure the progress of leaders in her coaching program. She stated: "We are using the assessment as the pre- and post-test method because we want to measure whether we are creating a program that is capable of increasing people's intercultural competence." In addition to using them to measure progress, Alex also uses the results to drive conversations, or coaching debriefs. She explained:

> I conducted individual debriefs with them to share their scores. You kind of go through the report and you explain what their score means. You talk through what they are and then you're supposed to kind of turn it into, like it's more of a conversation. So you asked them like, you know, tell me about your experiences working with people of cultural different cultural backgrounds. Like, what's that been like for you? And then you can say, 'OK, you know, your results show that you likely have some comfort and capability in doing XYZ, but you might struggle in these areas. So you kind of ask another resonate with you. Can you think of why you know your results might have revealed this? Tell me a bit about your experience with this.'

Alex discussed how the assessment results provided a foundation for deeper conversations with the leader to reflect on their experiences working with a diverse team. Bachar also used assessments to frame the coaching conversation specifically around

DEIB. He used multi-rater assessments to help his leader clients gain perspective from others and to uncover blind spots. He shared:

> So basically trying to really empower them to understand their blind spots as leaders, and we definitely have been using 360 assessment to really help them get that sentiment. Those insights from the folks around them and then we use that in turn of course to coach them through how to really develop new skill sets, how to model behaviors better, but also address those things and maybe they never knew about, you know, from the feedback.

Bachar stressed the importance of framing coaching around assessments, such as the multi-rater, in a way that not only helps leaders understand their gaps but also empowers them to self-reflect and to become more effective inclusive leaders. He continued to explain: “let’s kind of explore some of those results. To me, those are the added layers to help me understand like how they show up individually but also as a team lead or as a team member.” Lynn also mentioned how using assessments can help leaders understand better the way they show up as a leader and team player. Referring to her experience using the FIRO-B, interpersonal assessment, she stated:

> From a DEIB perspective, even though it wasn't really, I mean they would not have said it was created for that because that language wasn't there then. It wasn't—it's not used in that way, but I think it's really useful in that way because you can get people thinking about how different people, how they experience other people and what might be behind it.

For Bachar and Lynn, using assessments in coaching DEIB can reveal insights for the leader in how they connect and work with others. These insights can also build for the

leader a better appreciation for diverse perspectives, making their team members feel valued and heard.

Even though the majority of coaches in this study recommended using assessments for DEIB coaching, one participant, Petra, disagreed. In her interview, she described her experiences of using multi-rater assessments as actually diminishing a safe space for leaders and claimed, “the practicality of it is it takes away from psychological safety. It’s not a great practice.” When asked to clarify, Petra claimed that a more meaningful and psychologically safer approach is when “you sit and truly let people bring their own agenda and talk about what’s the most important thing happening with them. They need to make decisions about what they want to change. That’s powerful.” For Petra, using assessments, especially multi-rater or 360 type of assessments, can cause a client to feel more anxious or defensive and feel judged. This can cause resistance to the coaching process and diminish meaningful reflection and growth.

Expand Leaders' Intercultural Awareness

The findings revealed that a central strategy in DEIB coaching is to expand leaders’ intercultural awareness and competence. This strategy includes addressing differences more inclusively and equitably, thus fostering the ability to lead across diverse contexts. This strategy emerged as a recurring theme throughout the interviews. For example, Bachar shared his experiences coaching leaders who conveyed challenges connecting with team members they viewed as different. He recalled on experience:

> One of our research leaders on campus and one thing I love about, you know, coaching this person is that they definitely came to the table, you know, really hungry, very vulnerable, very humble. And like we talked about there are certain

> leaders on campus who are, who have been appointed to these roles just because [they've] been here 20 years now. This is great, but now you are leading a very diverse workforce. You know that does not look like you. And so you're like, well, how can I really resonate more with them? How can I really try to like let them know that I care about them as individuals? Then I'm not trying to just, you know, copy and paste this particular leadership style on the same people which we know doesn't work.

Bachar pointed out that when focusing on intercultural awareness with leader clients, they are able to see that their leadership style is not a one-size-fits-all. Instead, the leader must learn to connect with others on a more individual basis to discover a leadership style that better resonates with a diverse team. Bachar continued:

> So right now I'm working with that individual to help them, really be more compelling about how you really share, you know, your vision for your team, right? But how do you have a more compelling message of vision that resonates with everybody in your team? How do you create that space where people feel like you're considering them? How do you get to know them?

Bachar also identified that building intercultural awareness with the leader client also helps them create conditions where people feel considered and where they belong. Lynn also described a similar situation when she used this coaching approach to help a leader practice connecting with team members more authentically, especially in helping this leader with setting expectations and explaining organization policy and ways of doing things. She stated:

> Knowing that they've got, you know, that people have different challenges and

> different lived experiences. And so that was a matter of helping them practice what ways to get to know people, questions to ask. How to how to use the parameters of the organization's practice in a uh, authentic way without being rigid? It actually becomes kind of a lot of in the moment practice. You know, talking through. Well, let's see if I had this situation then here's the conversation, I think I need to have. OK, let's practice that.

Lynn also explained how she used DEIB coaching to help leaders become aware of differences between people's lived experiences and how not being aware of those differences can lead to incorrect assumptions and biases. She stated:

> In the course of working with a few of the people and helping them to understand the difference in their lived experience and the lived experience of other people who they are either onboarding through, they might be recruiting into staff, they might be onboarding them, they might be training them for something and understanding that people's lived experiences are different and therefore we can't make assumptions about, you know well just because I think it's fine to be expected to be in the office from this period. You know, this time to this time that isn't necessarily the case for everyone. And so how do you then, and so this is where some of the coaching would come in is with individuals. How do you then identify in it still an equitable way? How do you identify with new recruits or new people that you're onboarding? The specific needs that they may have to make their work life effective for them.

In addition to helping leaders think about how to connect with their diverse teams, the research participants also discussed this approach in terms of guiding the leaders through

self-reflection regarding their own cultural positions and how this may influence their ways of knowing and ways of being. Alex shared her coaching strategy with clients: “I’m asking you to think about your own cultural position and think about how what you’ve learned about culture has influenced your behaviors, your beliefs, your perspectives in a way that is just neutrally different than what people for another culture have.” When guiding clients to think about their own cultural positions and how this might impact their leadership style, as well as uncover biases, it can lead to using an interculturally competent lens to address issues or challenges based on differences, especially when a leader tends to downplay or minimize cultural differences. Alex explained:

> Something that they might on the surface perceive as a performance issue, how would you manage this issue with taking the lens that it might not be a performance issue? It might be a cultural difference, right? So we're trying to create change with their own management practices . . . we are looking for them to apply an interculturally competent lens.

Alex emphasized helping leaders use an interculturally competent lens to help them see past issues as strictly performance base and instead consider other factors involved, including the leader’s management practices. Alex then described how she would encourage her leader clients to question and critically challenge assumptions and biases about different cultural backgrounds. She shared:

> Like, how do they deal with conflict when it comes up at work and like getting to see that like there these things are informed by culture and so culture is like the thing that underpins the whole program that we're doing, right, cultural differences, these things are shaped by the culture that we either grew up in, we're

> exposed to. And then getting into think about, OK, how might we challenge some of these norms that we have people in our team who are from different cultures? We're not applying what we think is like the gold standard of leadership to somebody who comes from a different culture.

Alex stated how she would challenge the leader clients to look at the concept of leadership through an interculturally competent lens and discuss how to redefine leadership through that lens. Sally echoed this approach of challenging clients to apply an interculturally competent lens. She shared:

> How do you coach somebody who's talking about, well, I didn't get that job because somebody was unqualified just because they're black got it, and you're looking at the person who's a white male. . . . The coaching piece of that was explaining that, yeah, it is always frustrating, it's frustrating when we don't get something we really want, but also think about someone who is consistently not getting something because of the color of their skin. It's a way to just offer that as a what else could be true, and that's a powerful question, learning the powerful questions to ask, like, well, what else could be true, or learning not to ask the question why. It brings up the defensiveness.

Another method coaches used to expand leaders' intercultural awareness involves helping leaders overcome resistance to engaging with differences within their teams. Petra shared her experience of how coaching supported a leader in confronting and addressing a specific challenge with a team member who was different from them:

> For the person who maybe is challenged because the most difficult ones are the situations where someone is different. The leader is different. There's a different

> social identity that they hold and they feel as though that's going to get in the way of them being able to relate to their employee. And having them check that. What evidence is there that this could be true? And seeing that kind of a breakthrough where they were able to be more open with that employee to give the feedback. They were like seeing the person not really living into their full potential but they were wanting to say that for fear that they might get you know accused of being discriminatory or being hard on the person because of that and it was pretty powerful to see that at the end of the day they were able to show up as that mentor boss if you will for that employee and they developed a deeper richer relationship at the end of it and the person really considered themselves being mentored by their boss and feeling good about that instead of being singled out. And you know they could see that.

As participants in this study indicated, one key coaching strategy for expanding leaders' intercultural awareness involved using carefully framed, DEIB-informed questions. These questions encouraged leaders to critically examine dominant norms, challenge assumptions rooted in whiteness and heteronormativity and reflect on their own positions within systems of power and privilege. In addition to reflective questioning, participants also described employing history and storytelling as essential techniques in this process. By integrating personal and historical narratives, coaches helped leaders contextualize present-day inequities, connect emotionally with lived experiences different from their own, and cultivate greater empathy, humility, and openness to difference.

Using Storytelling and History

Coaches in this study also incorporated the use of history, stories, and other DEIB resources to educate the leader clients and to expand intercultural awareness. Beth, for instance, stressed the importance of a coach who works in DEIB to educate their clients in this area as a way to increase knowledge and understanding of DEIB. Beth advised:

> You must be willing to take the pace of the client as they are continuing to uncover, we're talking years of untapped territory of behavior because some coaches not only need to coach, but they also need to educate their clients. In DEIB coaching, you have to be willing to say, okay, let's pause the session. Or after this session, I'd like to send you some resources. After the session, I would like to explain something to you and clarify definitions and terms, or give them pre-work before the coaching session started. A lot of times our DEIB and coaching require learning. And for us, we are always onboard and teaching and educating our clients who want to know more.

Similarly, Willow's practice centers around using history of race, "specifically through the lens of, the perspective of, the anti-violence movement or black founders of the movement," as well as memoirs when coaching clients. She incorporates history as a way to illuminate historical inequities and the impact leaders have on systems that underscore these inequities. She shared:

> The way in which we do this work is we start with history, and we help people to understand the history of race in America and being able to help people understand the history of race also allows folks to understand connect that history to their culture their individual culture, how do you know who you are, what has been or hasn't been told or hasn't been told to you, what do you learn about

> rewards and punishments from this perspective, what behavior what socializations show up, and so we use that history as a basis and we kind of springboard from there.

Willow uses history as a springboard or opportunity to engage clients in conversations about differences and to challenge their perspectives about race critically, as well as how it relates to current DEIB issues. Ultimately, Willow uses it as a tool to help clients critically examine their positions and beliefs about race. She explained:

> There's a point I feel like in the coaching process where folks get to a point where they're like, 'ah man, it sucks that this happens somewhere, but it doesn't happen everywhere,' or 'that's not me oh no push-ah it's so sad,' and so it allows us the opportunity to kind of dig a little bit deeper into their world in that way and so we use real-world examples from aspects of their personal life. I work with white men who you know it was a very interesting space because for him he was like, no I work in theater I'm a very like soft and understanding and liberal person and I grew up in the Midwest and I don't see color and everybody just happened to live in the same neighborhood and you know it wasn't necessarily like we it's just either you work hard or you didn't and so you know no my family wasn't racist because we just never talked about it so it allowed us the opportunity to really dig into Midwest culture and let's talk about the fact that y'all talk about whiteness all the time without saying it let's talk about the fact that when we talk about who works hard and who doesn't what are we actually saying right what are the dog whistles that you're sending let's talk about the fact that like homogeneous societies don't just spring up on their own because people don't want just because

> people want them to like when we're when we're talking about homogeneous societies usually it's meant to keep people in or keep people out and so like that within itself and so being able to I think create spaces for that specific like we basically unraveled the pieces of their identity that they've used to say there is no way that this could ever live here and we may question everything. It gave them that space, right? It provides that space to talk about it.

Willow further explained that integrating history and sharing stories into the coaching practice aids clients in gaining insights into themselves as leaders and resonating with others with different lived experiences. This strategy helps leaders examine their privilege and how this may impact their decisions. Lynn also shared using stories and history to expand a leader's intercultural awareness. She stated:

> I'll bring in some, some history, some stories, you know, examples of what that looks like and have people think about if again they have to be open to it. But have people think about what their experiences were like and how they might have been different than other people that they that they knew? And so, you know, kind of grounding ourselves in our experiences growing up then helps us to be OK. So what does that look like now? And how can you imagine that that privilege is showing up in your workplace now and you will work relationships now? What can you do to use that as a, you know, as a positive, mechanism for change, and what do you need to to be aware of and do so that you're so that you're not creating challenges and creating problems when in fact what you're trying to do because you've told me you know you want to be part of the solution. Let's talk about some examples of what that looks like and, and you know what

> you're going to mess up because we mess up, and what do you do when you mess up?

Lynn's and Willow's use of history and stories in the coaching process also creates a space that allows leaders to learn from possible missteps. Royal and Petra also highlighted their experiences with leaders who were afraid to fail or say the wrong thing. Like Beth, Lynn, and Willow, Petra also uses resources to support leaders in navigating how to recover when they err in the DEIB space:

> So part of one of the skills in coaching is affirming people. And that's valuable when you're working with executives who feel like they can't be vulnerable. So sometimes the way in the door is having them read something. An article that sort of describes, if I come across something that sort of describes the situation that they're in. And it's been lived by someone else who is talking about where things went wrong. It sort of liberates them to see, oh, it is possible for me to talk about that and not be viewed as a failure because that's what they're avoiding. And I try to take that word out of my vocabulary. It's we were experimenting. What happened? We wanted a different outcome. If you had to do it again, what steps would you take? What did you miss? That's a lot easier than those questions like, how did what were you thinking? How did this go wrong? It's choosing those questions that are going to help people. So you start to study that when you are asking the question how it resonates, how it lands with a particular client. What motivates them to go inside versus put up the armor?

Integrating history, stories, and other resources into the coaching process is a strategy these coaches described in the interviews to help facilitate and build reflection, accountability, and resilience in leaders engaged in DEIB work.

Focus on Leader Behavior Impact and Power

The findings showed that a key approach to DEIB coaching included helping leaders build more awareness of how their behaviors significantly impact others and the organization's culture. Petra reflected in her interview: “My joy is coaching leaders because I think they have such an influence on the experience of others who come to work, and it’s been where I want to focus.” This influence, or impact on others, stems from leaders’ habits, leading to behaviors. Petra continued to say, “So I'm more into habits. You know? And developing those habits that lead to behaviors. Because that's what makes the difference in our relationships is how we behave with each other.” Other participants discussed helping leaders become more aware of their habits and behaviors, stating there is often a gap between current behavior and desired leader behavior for DEIB in organizations. Willow shared that one of her DEIB coaching approaches “centers around this larger idea of understanding the gap that exists between who we think we are, how we actually show up in spaces and what does our oppressive muscle memory look like and how does that also impact how we show up at work and what version of ourselves are we showing up at work.” This approach involves helping the leader, through coaching, identify the habits that are causing oppressive behavior and the impact this behavior has on others in the workplace. She continued to explain:

> Where we really get into this idea of understanding your oppressive habits and replacing those oppressive habits with anti-oppressive habits and that is what that

> coaching structure is mainly focused on. It is how do we how do we move from theory to practice and how are we able to I think the best word is to help clients identify their own oppressive habits.

Willow's DEIB coaching approach works to lessen the gap between leaders' current oppressive habits and their desired anti-oppressive habits.

Other participants discussed their coaching approach of exploring this gap with leaders and the benefits of helping the leader become more aware of their impact. For instance, Sally shared that exploring this gap is where leaders begin to understand more clearly the areas where they may be inadvertently exerting undue control or silencing others. She explained:

> Exploring the gap is about exploring what happened between, like, what's keeping them from getting to where they want to go. There's a gap between what they want and what's happening and where they want to go, and exploring that gap is where some of the most meaningful coaching can happen because it can be where the epiphanies happen or the person's like, you know what, I don't want to be like this anymore.

Exploring this gap to help leaders become more aware of their impact can also motivate the leader to take accountability for actions that diminish DEIB.

Another way participants discussed this approach of exploring the gap, or coaching the gap, was to empower leaders, especially leaders who may feel a lack of belonging in the organization. When asked what is meant by "coaching the gap," Beth explained:

> So the gap, coach to gap, is about moving someone from feeling empowered to

> disempowered to empowered, even if it's temporary because it's not necessary a steady state, especially from someone who comes from an historical excluded group and they don't feel like they belong in their own country or they don't feel like they belong in an organization. So no matter what the organization is designed as, people don't feel like they belong, even if it's in a family community organization, if you don't feel like you belong, then you will always feel like you're in a state of disempowerment. So the idea is how do you shift someone from powerless or disempowered to empowered, and coaching the gap is what [I'm] referring to.

Like Sally and Beth, Royal discussed the impact on their teams when leaders do not feel empowered or even feel as if they are not valued. Her coaching approach focuses on helping these leaders understand that impact and to come up with strategies. She explained:

> A lot of the coaching calls that were around people feeling like they weren't seen or heard or valued in the workplace and being able to coach with them so that they had some constructive strategies on how to deal with that and not just strategies for how to deal with it, but a mindset for not letting that diminish how they saw themselves in that space and the value that they bring to that space. And being able to, I guess, move with more confidence. And then also knowing that impacted the way they led and interacted and treated others. So you know when you have that transformation internally, and I'll just give you an example, like when you're in a workplace where you feel threatened, you can't be at your best as a leader, you just can't because you're in survival mode. But when you can have

> strategies to be able to more constructively deal with that as well as the mindset not to let it bring you down, then that puts you in a better position to be at your best and to lead inclusively instead of, you know, being on edge and letting that stress that you're feeling impact others around you.

Bachar also shared this approach, stating how difficult it is for leaders to create conditions for belonging and safety if they feel disempowered or if they feel like they do not belong. He stated:

> So you've seen it for yourself, you know, leaders who lead departments and departments are in shambles. Look back at the leader. Something is probably not right with the leader as far as how they show up, how they feel about themselves and their lashing out and unhealthy ways on their department members. So I feel like a leader can't really, you know, foster those, you know, those sense, sense of belonging in their community, unless they and themselves feel like they belong, they feel safe and they have really worked on themselves from a kind of emotional intelligence standpoint. So yeah, that's that's kind of how I feel about that.

Petra further emphasized this strategy, continuing to discuss how empowering leaders can lead to better decision-making, thus resulting in a more positive impact on their teams and the organization. Petra continued:

> Really good coaching empowers. Really bad coaching makes people dependent on advice. And so everything designed for inclusive leaders for leading women in tech is about empowering people. To make the best decisions for themselves. Holistically in a moment because that's what makes us better leaders. Right?

> We're thinking not only for ourselves but we're thinking for other people. And always keeping that impact present. Like what's my impact on others?

In addition to a leader's impact on others in the organization, participants discussed a key strategy in DEIB coaching to help leaders become more aware of their potential impact and influence on the systems impacting oppressive conditions in the organization. For example, Beth indicated:

> So when you look at systems, you have to understand individuals control systems. So you have individuals who either vote for something to operate a certain way or individuals are holding the gate or what we call gatekeepers to avoid change. And so with that in mind, individuals can, can, who are interested in changing behavior, interested in doing something different, they then become more self-aware first in what ways am I contributing to this system of oppression, this system of injustice? How can I make a difference in changing it? So their awareness comes first after they become more aware and that's through the coach approach, the more self-aware they become, the more they understand how they play a part of that system and their wanting and willingness to do something about that is the gift that they get through the coach approach.

Lynn and Willow echoed Beth's point about DEIB coaching to help leaders understand their roles in supporting or not supporting DEIB initiatives. For instance, Lynn discussed her coaching approach of helping leaders better understand positionality and impact. She explained: "My place is, if you will, from a DEIB perspective and that is in helping other white people in particularly white women understand our historic role in either creating or preventing inclusion and equity." Willow described her approach coaching leaders in

this way as: “where I work with them and support them in interrogating their own relationship with anti-blackness white supremacy and specific I would say barriers to engaging or embedding an anti-oppressive leadership strategy.”

Beth did point out in her interview, however, that the possible impact, influence, and power leaders have over systems is more intersectional, meaning it is not based strictly on race. She pointed out:

> Individuals who, so here's the monkey wrench for this. Most people believe that power is exclusive to race because the United States, the condition was created under the lens of race, but being, having power and privilege comes from you just having more access to something someone else does not, right? So my access, so I would say the individuals who are privileged, privileged in education, privileged in geolocation, privileged in different ways, they can be coached based on how they treat others who are less privileged.

Beth emphasized that privilege and access can be based on gender, class, and education, for example. A major component of DEIB coaching is guiding leaders to reflect on their own intersecting identities to understand how their access to power and opportunities show up and can impact relationships.

Navigating Challenges and Establishing Boundaries for Successful DEIB Coaching

This set of findings emphasized the importance of coaches who engage in DEIB work being able to effectively navigate the challenges of DEIB coaching. By navigating these challenges effectively, coaches can better facilitate the benefits coaching offers in leader development.

A Growth Mindset is Needed

Willow iterated in her interview: “I don’t coach everyone who wants to be coached because not everybody is ready.” The point she was emphasizing was that coaching for DEIB will not be effective or even safe if the leader client is not willing to grow or change. Most participants in this study echoed this point that a client must have a growth mindset for DEIB coaching to be successful. Alex, for example, stressed the need to establish boundaries around for whom the DEIB coaching is intended. She remarked: “for this program, we made it very clear this is not for people who are resisting argumentative, combative around DEI. This is for people who care because we're not trying to rehabilitate folks, right? We're trying to help folks grow further.” Similar to Alex’s sentiment about “not trying to rehabilitate folks,” Willow shared how she will not work with leaders who are unwilling to grow in DEIB work or even acknowledge they need help in this area. Willow stated: “I am not interested in negotiating my humanity and the humanity of oppressed people. I’m just not interested in doing that, and so there are some folks who are wonderful at it though, and they have the patience of Job, but that is not me.” Instead, Willow works with leaders who exhibit a growth mindset by acknowledging their need to develop in DEIB work. She shared:

> They were able to say this is the moment that I participated in something that would be considered oppressive this is how the culture of oppression has shown up in some of the ways in which I have been taught about race and this is what I'm struggling with these are the pieces that I’m finding really hard uh to let go of that for me is an indicator of my ability whether or not I would be able to work with someone or not.

Participants also framed the need for clients to have a growth mindset as meaning that coaching should not be punitive and instead seen more as developmental. For instance, Alex shared that the success of her leader development program is tied to framing it as "an opportunity for growth." She explained: "So being able to frame this in neutral and in a developmental way, it is not critical and punitive, but is truly like this is an opportunity for growth and every single person in this program, myself included, has growth in this area." Expanding on this point, Bachar described one benefit of using coaching as a developmental tool is that it helps develop different levels of leaders in a positive way. He stated:

> To me it's not really a punitive measure. So it's not performance base, but it's more developmental base, right? So I think somebody does get into these leadership roles. You know, just by the sake of circumstance, like, oh, you've been here so many years. That's promote you now you're people leader or they see that you're a great SME at something now let's make you a people leader. I mean, there's so many different avenues you can get into. So there are so many different ways you can enter into leadership roles. But I think to me, coaching is just a great developmental tool because no matter, you know what level you are, whether you are a novice, whether you are seasoned, whether you are a troublemaker or whatever, your of your persona is, it just helps to really develop you in a positive manner.

Beth also claimed that leaders should not feel as if they are being punished when they are required to receive coaching and stressed the importance of iterating what coaching is and what it is not. This distinction is important in overcoming the challenge of possible

resistance because for some people, Beth explained, they are “typically introduced to coaching in a way that feels like it’s a punishment.” She continued to point out how coaching for a punitive intervention can require different techniques than DEIB coaching:

> In my world, when a client tells us it's mandatory or everyone's going to get a coach those sessions typically require a different technique in order for the client to feel like they are not being punished because they're being required to go. And we have to typically dispel the myth of what coaching is and is not, because if you're using coaching for performance, for performance improvement that is punitive, like it's tied to particular outcome, then we're not, we're not going to work with you. We cannot work with you, but there's some coaches who will.

Here, Beth also echoed Willow’s point of turning down clients if coaching is for punitive measures. Similarly, Petra acknowledged she would also turn down clients for this reason. She stated:

> I will say I don't know if I'm the right coach. Okay. For you, you know, but I'm willing to tell you here's how I practice coaching. Here's how I want you to show up. And when you're ready you know I'll be here. But I tend to like to work with those folks who like to continue to grow. And so I will turn down the people where it's a turnaround type of situation. Okay. Like or where coaching's going to get a bad rap because you know, punitive. Yeah. You're already one foot out the door. I'm not doing that. Right. That's the HR employee relations problem. But if you're in growth mode like I'm here but I want to be here that's ideal.

Another reason participants stated that a growth mindset is needed for successful DEIB coaching is that if a client is not willing to change, then there is not anything to coach or

rather it becomes more of a compliance intervention or an act of just checking a box. A growth mindset is therefore needed to address meaningful behavior change in coaching. Bachar shared:

> If they're here to really change their behaviors, then I can help them. When they're not willing to change. Then I don't take them as a client or I'll stop and we won't continue because I cannot, you know, help somebody who doesn't want help himself, and especially if they're unwilling to change when they know that they need to, then I can't help them.

Likewise, Beth shared the same viewpoint, stressing that a leader must be interested in understanding what is needed to change. It is not possible to force someone to change without that willingness or desire. She stated: "Again, their willingness and interests must be there, because of they're not willing to change, there's nothing to coach. I can't force someone to shift." In much the same way as Beth, Alex stressed the need for a client to be open to growth in areas around DEIB issues, no matter how uncomfortable it may be for the client. When a growth mindset is present, she found that clients gain more from the coaching. She further explained: "I think that's one thing I learned in this program is that the folks who are receptive, who are the ones that are like, 'Oh my God, I just remember this terribly racist thing I did one time,' like they're getting more out of it, right? Like they're the ones that are really cutting it. Things are clicking for them."

Coaching Makes it Relevant

A common theme that emerged from the interviews is how participants discussed the successes of using coaching for DEIB. Participants noted that when coaching is integrated with DEIB leader development, it sustains knowledge and fosters learning

transfer because it makes the development relevant for the leader. Petra described adding a coaching component to her DEIB leader development programs to ensure better learning transfer and retention. She explained:

> So the third program came from those. Which was saying let me take the coaching component and extend it. Because I saw the value. That's where I said, you know, there's training and then there's coaching to reinforce what people learn in the training. And so then wanting to be able to offer it more. And that's like my mission right now is to expand opportunities for coaching.

For Petra, coaching added value to her existing DEIB learning and development programs. Similarly, Beth realized that coaching was a missing component for more meaningful DEIB learning. She also described her experience of developing a coaching component and framework specifically for DEIB training. Beth stated:

> The coaching work I was extremely interested in because I realized that no matter what thought leadership you were studying most frequently it would end in one ear and out the other. So you end class and kind of go back to work and you use a few skills and then it's gone. Like there was no real sustaining and maintaining of the knowledge. When I went through my first coaching course back in 2007, I realized that that was the missing ingredients. Like wait a minute, if I can get people to increase their interest in this and then help them observe their own behavior and patterns, I think they would sustain that learning from the thought leadership and practicing regarding leadership. And so that increased my curiosity on how coaching could become a better part of leadership and organization development. . . . And so through diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, we

> realized that it's not the visible diversity that is needing the shift of behavior. It's what's below the surface. And so integrat[ing] coaching and DEIB together was the game changer.

Here, Beth echoed Petra's point that integrating coaching with DEIB leader development helps to sustain and maintain knowledge. Moreover, both participants discussed how coaching, as a missing ingredient, was also a way to make DEIB training more personal for the client and, therefore, more relevant.

The findings show that coaching, rather than just taking a class, can support creating a more individualized and personal experience in addition to sustaining knowledge and increasing learning transfer. Bachar, for example, stated:

> Well, I think you know being told to take a class, you know, it's kind of like, OK, I can take it. But it's a checkmark, so you never know what mindset somebody is in when they're taking a class. Because if if you're telling them they're gonna do it. But is their heart really into it versus coaching is a more gradual more in-depth approach where it really does to me look at you know a person holistically and really does like have more care and concern because you're taking one-on-one time, just really invest into that, that person's development versus a class.

Bachar is saying that when coaching makes it personal and, therefore, more relevant, it can motivate or inspire leaders towards change. He continued to share his experience of how a more personalized approach through coaching helps with breakthroughs and facilitates authentic behavior change as opposed to someone in class who may be viewing DEIB as something to check-off or as part of compliance training. Bachar stated: "it's really hard to be in front of a coach and really like fake the funk for like several sessions.

I mean, you gotta, you gotta you gotta breakthrough at some point. So I feel like coaching to me is harder for that to kind of be like a check mark, a robotic, you know, effort." Alex shared a similar conclusion and discussed the value of incorporating coaching with DEIB leader development programs. She described:

> Coaching adds a dimension that makes it personal for them. They can't just sit in a class and tune out and claim credit at the end. They have to be invested in their own learning and so I think where coaching has really been helpful is help them personalize the program to them and their own goals and where they are and where they could be going. We offer a lot of trainings, are just open to everyone and they're great. People learn a lot, but do they grow? I don't know if you grow in a training, they're 100 people are sitting there on teams, but with this, the what the coaching does is it helps personalize it for them and make the program that we're offering feel more personal, feel more connected, feel more relatable.

Alex emphasized how coaching aids in connecting the leader more with the learning outcomes. The value of coaching, for Alex, is in the ability to make the content more relatable. Additionally, for Alex and other participants, coaching provides the space for leaders to reflect on how they have applied what they learned and process what has changed for them in becoming more inclusive leaders.

Alex shared her process of using coaching to help leaders reflect on changes. She explained the coaching questions she asks during sessions:

> The midpoint check in first of all was like what is something that you are doing differently now since you know we've done we're in, we're halfway through the program. Can you tell me about even if it's a shift in perspective or a change in

> behavior, something you're thinking seeing doing differently? And so we are asking about what are some practical applications of you know, this program so far and some of them have really great examples. Like I came up with, you know, I had encountered this problem on my team and I was able to think about it from air, culturally competent lands, and I was able to do this differently.

Being able to ask the leader directly in a coaching session about what they see as positive change was integral to recognizing DEIB skills and competencies as relevant. Similarly, Royal described how she uses the coaching space to help measure the relevancy and impact of coaching for DEIB:

> So we had specific questions that asked, you know, how, what have you, what did you learn out of what you learn in? And I'm just paraphrasing this out of what you learn. What have you applied and what impact has that had? Because we were really trying to get a handle on the transformation that occurred because to us that was really the power in the value of coaching. Is the behavior change in the transformation that happens as a result of that?

Petra expressed a similar perspective on how coaching makes DEIB relevant for leaders:

> So when people come in from the [DEIB leadership development] experience, I will often ask them as coach how are you applying or do you recognize this as an efficacy moment? And if you are operating in that framework what do you see? Or this might be you know when you go through [the program] and you read their lead you know is that your shitty first draft? So people start to reflect back on oh my goodness so whereas I've learned that I can tie back those moments of in coaching to what was learned it's kind of why I wanted to experiment with it from

this DEIB platform.

Royal and Petra articulated the value of coaching as making DEIB learning relevant by helping leaders reflect on how they apply what they have learned and discuss the impact it is having on their teams within the organization. Coaching also helps make it relevant by creating the space for leaders to discuss and identify behavior change and shifts in perspective.

Managing Resistance and Safety

The dangers of facilitating DEIB work was another common theme among some participants, especially for the participants who identified as black and women, when asked to discuss the challenges of coaching DEIB for leader development. For these women, the dangers involved the possible elimination of programs associated with DEIB, being triggered by clients, and personal safety. Janja discussed her fear of the consequences of possible discontinuation of DEIB training and leader development in her organization:

> I don't know where the landscape of [this organization] and higher Ed is going because we had this huge wave of all things diversity and now we're having this huge contraction of all things diversity and I just want to be sure that that we don't forget about our, about our underrepresented populations across every dimension, every axis of diversity. And if we don't put those types of mechanisms in place with our leaders, then my fear is will go back to the 1960s like we'll go back, we'll go back and everybody, everybody will suffer, yeah.

Janja explained that her leader had proactively changed her job title to remove any reference to DEIB. She said “he didn’t want me to come in under fire. It was good, I get

it. I get it. It's a, you know, a floodgate." She referenced how any program focusing on DEIB was under target at the time of the interview. Similarly, Willow also expressed frustration with having to navigate threats to the coaching work she does for DEIB programs and how it would cause burnout and sometimes fear for her job security. She said, "it was important for me to take frequent breaks because at my [organization], I'm the only coach it was also important for me to again safety, safety, safety, safety. I would never not say it enough because I don't think people realize what it means for oppressed folks to engage in this type of work." In addition to recently taking frequent breaks, she was also explicit about how she is selective with who she takes on as a coaching client. She explained, "I don't take on everyone who wants to be coached as a safety precaution." Willow continued to stress the importance of setting boundaries for herself in way that ensured psychological safety to continue addressing oppression in the organization:

> I think that the reality of being a black woman doing this work and ensuring that I take care of myself ensuring that I take frequent breaks is very important. I think to do this work as a black woman to say this is going to be the way in which I actively work to continue to do anti-violence work because this is still anti-violence work because we can't end violence without ending oppression, and this is the work that targets oppression right at its source.

Janja and Willow each articulated how in doing DEIB work, they can be targeted by others who resist change or operate from anti-DEIB perspectives and initiatives. They stressed how it is important for DEIB coaches, especially coaches of color, to safeguard against possible discriminatory or aggressive practices, both within and outside of the

organizations in which they work. They also indicated how exhausting it can be to continue doing the work under these conditions.

Sharing sentiments similar to Janja and Willow, Petra shared how she balances safeguarding against discrimination and continuing to do DEIB coaching in higher education. She shared:

> It can be emotionally exhausting. I try to keep that in mind. And when I am going to be coaching people, I honestly have to work with myself. Like really empty my mind and you know, whatever's happening and to be present. And that's where I find the mindfulness practices that I've been working on are so helpful.

Petra discussed the need for "being present" and "mindful," as part of self-management or reflexivity in moments where it may be triggering or if she is navigating an organizational challenge that may negatively impact her work in DEIB. For Petra, she focuses on the client in the moment and will work to not let the organizational challenge affect the coaching relationship. Bachar also expressed the importance of reflexivity, though he did not discuss his fear of safety or potential challenges to his employment. He shared the challenge of balancing his role as a coach and helping someone who has expressed racist tendencies:

> So I have to realize I have to, you know, take a lens that I'm not. This is not personal, you know this. You know, I have my own beliefs. They have their beliefs, and my goal is again, you know, based upon, you know, I go back to what's what is their goal of me coaching them right. So they are racist and they are having issues with trying to really break out of that, you know, race those racist tendencies. Then I go back to why are we here? I go back to let's focus on

> what you need to do to move, you know, from these behaviors to these behaviors. And I don't take it personal like I just. I mean, I strongly just take a personalized focus back on why we're here, because if they're here to really change their behaviors, then I can help them with. They're not willing to change. Then I don't take them as a client or I'll stop and we won't continue because I cannot, you know, help somebody who doesn't want help himself, and especially if they're unwilling to change when they know that they need to, then I can't help them.

When coaching someone with different values, Bachar discussed using self-reflection to help him focus on the overall purpose or outcome of DEIB coaching: to help a leader who wants to change his discriminatory behavior or who wants to grow as a more inclusive leader. He acknowledged, though, that the leader must wish to change or be willing to change. If that is not the case, then he feels it is outside of his capability or control.

Reflexivity and Continual Self-Development for DEIB Coaches

This set of findings emphasizes the need for coaches who engage in DEIB work to focus on continuing self-development and engage in reflective practice that includes self-management and reflexivity techniques.

Building Awareness and Recognizing Personal Biases

Throughout the study, all the participants discussed the importance of practicing self-reflection and continuing to develop self-awareness skills. Participants noted that reflection and self-awareness aided them significantly when coaching leaders for DEIB, especially in understanding better your own capacities and capabilities as coaches. Royal,

for example, pointed out that self-reflection and awareness helped her with knowing who she could or could not help with coaching. She explained:

> There's certain types of coaching that I found are not the space I need to be in, because too often you get in that lane and people don't want to do real coaching. They just wanna be validated or they just wanna focus on 'I wanna be MVP of this one day,' but they don't wanna dig deeper into what's all goes into that like so. And I think that's part of self-reflection is knowing who you can serve in what you bring, because there's not one coach that can serve everybody in the world of different needs, cause you just can't. So it's kind of knowing what your lane is.

Royal conveyed that she felt she would not be as effective at executive coaching as she would coaching specifically for DEIB. Royal feels more equipped to guide leaders to become more inclusive in this space as opposed to a more performative or career-climbing goal. Similarly, Petra expressed the importance of engaging in self-awareness and knowing with whom you can be effective in coaching based on your capabilities. She stated:

> It's emotionally exhausting to coach. And especially executives and the level of intensity at times that they come at things. Sometimes the challenge is they're not slowing down enough, right? Or they're not reflecting deeply enough. And but when you can, we're all we all have the capability to go there. Now the good coach helps you get there. And I will say that you know you have to know who you can be effective with as a coach. That's part of being a good coach.

Petra emphasized that effective coaches are self-aware of their skills and strengths, as well as their limitations. This awareness ensures the leader client receives the right

support. Beth reinforced Royal's and Petra's points about developing self-awareness, especially when it comes to how a coach's biases or own culture could impact their coaching approaches. She explained that in her practice of training DEIB coaches:

> Self-awareness, being able to know who you are and how you project your own cultural norms onto someone else, your own biases and how you show up. So the deepening of self-awareness in our classrooms, my curriculum is designed for you to be the first client. So you need to know and be more self-aware. So you know they're not my type. I can't coach that type of person. My skills aren't going to go so far. I know who I am. I know my skills.

When training other coaches to work in DEIB, Beth challenges them to deepen their own awareness of biases and how they impact the coaching space for clients. For Beth and her practice, being aware of and acknowledging biases help to avoid unintentional conflict, as well as improve objectivity. Similarly, Sally and Bachar also discussed the importance of acknowledging blind-spots and assumptions and how these can impact coaching choices. Sally explained:

> We are all always at choice. Always. And so remembering that with a client who might feel powerless, we're always at choice. And you have that as a coach, too. I can make a choice to lean into my assumptions and biases or I can make a choice to fight against them and push them aside and open my heart and mind to my client in a way that is very much in the DEIB space.

Sally emphasized that DEIB coaches, like the leaders they are coaching, are not immune to biases. By stating that coaches have a choice, Sally suggested that it is the coach's responsibility for how they approach the leader-client and the coaching relationship.

Furthermore, “at choice” indicated a deliberate, active effort to acknowledge and manage biases rather than ignoring them. Additionally, Bachar discussed the importance of coaches to be aware of their blind spots and biases. He added that coaches should also be able to identify their core values and understand what challenges them to help others:

> So you as a coach have to actually be willing to uncover your own biases, your own blind spots, do your own 360, go through your own like sense of awareness and introspection first, so that you can actually that are show up because one thing that we learned about is like what are your core values as a person, right. If you're trying to coax somebody, do you even know your own core values? What's important to you? What makes you really like, you know, not sleep at night or get up in the morning so that that was a very powerful, you know, process for me to go through because I was able to really grow and learn in my own space even before, like I even started coaching anybody like that was helpful for me to do that myself.

In addition to becoming aware of how biases and assumptions can impact a coach’s choice of question or method, participants also highlighted the importance of knowing their own triggers and, therefore, enacting self-management or reflexivity skills when with a client who may trigger them. Beth discussed this in her interview:

> So a client does not have to align with my values nor my view of the world. I just need to know who I am and if I will be triggered by what is said by that client. So as a coach, I must be aware of my triggers. I must be aware of certain words that will throw me off. I must be aware of certain behaviors that will cause me to lose focus. The gift that you get as a coach when you're deepening your own self-

> awareness is that level of understanding so that you can say no to that client before you onboard them.

Beth recognized that when a coach is aware of her triggers, she can remain present during a challenging coaching session and committed to best coaching practices. Moreover, this self-awareness also helps the coach determine to whom they say no when coaching is requested. Petra also discussed the significance of self-management and reflection after a coaching session if she felt triggered by something a client stated. She described:

> Although there are times when you get triggered as a coach. But self-management is another skill the coach has to practice so even when you're triggered you don't go to processing that right there. You process it later. You know, after they've gone and the first place you always want to go is the place you want your clients to go. Hmm. Where's that coming from?

As the participants in this study expressed, this theme highlights the responsibility coaches have to examine their blind spots and acknowledge their biases or when those biases are influencing questions or other behaviors during the coaching session. It is not enough to be neutral but to also choose to apply reflexivity to mitigate their biases.

Ongoing Self-Development

Another theme that emerged in the data is continuing learning and development as a coach. The participants discussed ongoing self-development as a must for what is needed to be effective for DEIB coaching in leader development. Beth exclaimed, "Without a doubt, Rachel, I think it's most important that one, coaches are knowledgeable. Coaches must be knowledgeable. Knowledge means being willing to go and look for, to be more culturally aware. They don't have to be culturally competent, but

they need to be culturally aware." Become knowledgeable and more aware of DEIB competencies as a coach involves developing new skills and improving abilities to deliver successful programs and coaching. Alex stated: "I had to learn myself what intercultural competence was, or I had to get really familiar with the language and the concept, so I had to do a lot of personal education to make this particular program successful because this was kind of new to me, too, right?" Beth and Alex stressed an ongoing commitment to learning and staying informed of DEIB topics and best practices. DEIB is a fluid and constantly changing field, shaped and influenced by social and political events. Continuous education ensures that coaches stay up to date on research, perspectives, and changes. This self-development helps coaches grow cultural competencies and avoid potentially outdated methods that could unintentionally marginalize or even harm others.

Participants noted that it is important to be knowledgeable in not only DEIB topics but also in the coaching process and different techniques to use with clients with different needs. This area of growth helps to strengthen a coach's ability to deliver more adaptive DEIB coaching. Beth explained that for skills, coaches should be "constantly going in and leveling up those skills so that you are, you know, staying current. And I mean current on the tools and new thought leadership. So read new books and find out who's doing new research, like, you know, your upcoming dissertation. So those things really do add value when you're working with clients." Petra echoed similar sentiments:

> So it goes back to what self-reflection or professional development do you engage in to kind of help with that. And also to enhance your ability to deliver DEIB focus coaching. So, I continuously train in diversity and inclusion, but training like allyship is really powerful when it comes to helping people think about where

> they are versus where they could be. The mindfulness training which teaches you to sit with your emotions. Deeply sit with your emotions. The storytelling training which has been really powerful. To be able to help people share their stories. Release their stories. Some conflict management training as well.

For Petra, learning about different coaching methods and approaches advances her coaching capabilities and allows for her to be a more dynamic coach. Similarly, Lynn also recommends using different coaching frameworks based on where the client is during the session. This recommendation further supports the idea of ongoing self-development for effective DEIB coaching and was reflected in other participant interviews. For instance, Beth reiterated:

> So I believe best coaches have that variety of knowledge base that allows for you to bring in some of those traditional or previously learned thought leadership models that allows for you to grab onto it in the moment. So again cognitive behavior theory, psychological safety, those are two that are typically used again and again because we're talking about one feel like people how would they think, how they feel and be in their actions all the way through how someone feels safe or how do they create safety for themselves?

Beth's belief and experience about how the best coaches are the ones who are knowledgeable in different methods and approaches had been iterated throughout her interview. Sally shared a similar view when describing her commitment to developing as a DEIB coach: "My responsibility is to be a good coach and to continue my training and to come in and [be] open-minded and to know what I'm doing." Beth and Sally suggested an obligation as a coach is a commitment to lifelong learning. Furthermore, a key point

raised by Sally is that ongoing self-development is not only about learning; it is also about unlearning. She explained:

> It's a lifelong, I call it, it's a lifelong learning and unlearning, so having to, I feel like almost every week I'm learning something in a new way, or I'm unlearning something that I didn't even realize I had learned in a certain way, whether it be how I was socialized, or, I use this example, in any given month I will say something, and I'll stop and go, where does that phrase come from? And then I'll either go, ooh, that probably has an icky background, and I'll look it up, and it's just that kind of awareness of even what we say that can have impact.

Sally's discussion highlights the connection between self-awareness, remaining curious, and seeking development to improve how a coach can be more effective in the DEIB space. She recognized:

> So my own, my own becoming an anti-racist, which has been, I say becoming, and I'm not an anti-racist, because I will never stop learning, and messing up, and just in my thoughts and actions and words, and working against racism and hate, and over the last 15, 20 years, I've become more racially aware, and just more angry, I guess, about what isn't happening in the world, I really saw in DEIB a way for me to not just say the words, but to walk the walk, to get involved, so I've been involved in different things on campus, and inclusive leaders was a real important piece of that for me, tied into my own doctoral work, which is very much focused on DEIB, and then moving into that coaching space, which just, it just made sense to me, it seemed a natural progression along the spectrum of my own development as an anti-racist over the last several years of my life.

For Sally, this idea of "becoming" is strongly linked to ongoing learning, as well as practicing and learning from failure. She continued: "like I feel this calling to keep doing this work, and I fail, and I flub, and I mess up, and I dust myself off, and I keep going, so that's why I say becoming an anti-racist, because I'm never going to get it completely right." Like Sally, Bachar also emphasized the importance of learning from failure, and he shared how coaches should not let the fear of failure keep them from continuing to do DEIB work; failing is part of practice and learning. He stated:

> You know coaching is a process and it takes practice. You know, practice makes perfect. That's all I can say. So when I was going through my stuff, I felt like I really sucked at it for the for the first several times. And they're like, no, no, no. Keep doing it, you know? And so well practice makes perfect. And so it's just like you're human. They're human, and so there's really nothing you can say. This is always going to be perfect or come out perfect, so if you mess up, say it say in a different way. And you know, if you don't get the response you want, ask a different question, so I'll just learn to kind of just roll with the punches and just that you're human because the more that you show you're human, the more they'll be more comfortable with you. And it'll kind of be a better coaching circle altogether.

Bachar's experience reinforces the idea that DEIB coaching can be vulnerable for both the client and the coach—it is a human aspect that is not perfection, and coaching is about providing a space to process through and to learn from failures and imperfections.

DEIB work has an evolving nature that is influenced and shaped by many different factors, such as social, political, and policies. As this theme in the data suggests,

coaches who engage in continuous self-development and education can stay current with changes in DEIB methodologies and topics and thus better serve their clients and contribute to the development of more inclusive leaders.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from qualitative data collected from the experiences of nine professionals who used DEIB coaching to develop inclusive leaders. I have organized the findings into three sections, corresponding to the research questions guiding the inquiry. Through the interviews, participants discussed how they used coaching as a leadership development method to build leaders' skills, competencies, and capacity to advance DEIB in organizations. The participants also shared how they navigate those challenges and hedge the successes of DEIB coaching.

First, for more effective DEIB leadership development, coaches employed dynamic coaching strategies and methods. The participants collectively identified these dynamic strategies and methods included creating a safe space for clients to embrace vulnerability and engage in deeper self-reflection to explore underlying patterns and mindsets that counter DEIB efforts. Participants pointed out how they used strategies to suspend judgment and practice empathy and compassion to create a safe space for these possible uncomfortable discussions. Coaches also help guide the leaders to understand and articulate the "why" or reason DEIB is important for successful organizations. Coaches also use assessments to provide insights to help create a more personal, relevant learning experience around DEIB. The participants also identified the power of expanding leaders' intercultural awareness by using stories and history. Participants also

used coaching to help leaders focus on their impact on feelings of inclusion and belonging and to become more empowered in advancing DEIB in their organizations.

Second, coaches focused on navigating challenges and establishing boundaries for successful DEIB coaching. These include ensuring the client comes to coaching with a growth mindset and willingness to change. Common challenges in DEIB coaching included resistance to changing or challenging perspectives that are counter to the client's values. Participants also described coaching as "the secret sauce" for more impactful DEIB learning and development, where it makes DEIB more personal and relevant for leaders.

Third, the findings show that coaches build awareness and acknowledge personal biases when engaging in DEIB coaching. Moreover, the evolving nature of DEIB work demands that coaches stay current, challenge their own assumptions, and deepen their expertise through continuing learning and development. By embracing lifelong learning, DEIB coaches not only improve their own practice but also contribute to broader social change.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative study aimed to understand how coaching is used in leadership development to influence leaders' ability to advance DEIB in organizations, or in other words, to develop more inclusive leaders. More specifically, I wanted to know how DEIB coaching techniques, strategies, and/or frameworks may differ from mainstream executive or leadership coaching frameworks. Two research questions guided this study in achieving this purpose. First, how has coaching been used as a DEIB intervention for leadership development in higher education organizations? Second, what do coaches say about the challenges and benefits of DEIB coaching for leaders? Furthermore, the theoretical framework that shaped the study included the conceptualization of leadership coaching, critical Human Resource Development, and critical theory. I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to collect data from nine selected practicing coaches, each with specific experience coaching DEIB in higher education settings. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis method to identify themes supporting the study's research questions, which resulted in descriptive categories delineating the experiences of practicing DEIB coaches. These experiences provided insights into the methods, strategies, challenges, and benefits of using coaching to develop more inclusive leaders. This chapter summarizes the study and discusses the major conclusions of using DEIB coaching to develop more inclusive leaders, along with implications for theory, practice, and research.

Summary of the Study

Nine coaches who have worked or currently work in higher education and coached DEIB for leaders were purposefully selected (Merriam & Simpson, 2016) to participate in this study. The participants ranged in age from 40 to 70, with a diverse range of experience coaching DEIB, from 1 to 30 years. Four of the participants have trained other coaches in DEIB-focused methods in addition to coaching clients. Eight out of nine participants identified as women, and one identified as a man. Four participants are white, and five are black.

Face-to-face interviews, virtual or in-person, were conducted as the primary data source. Seven of the nine interviews were conducted through a video call using Zoom, and two were held in a conference room at the participant's place of work. The interviews took up to one hour and fifteen minutes. All interviews were recorded with each participant's permission. Immediately after the interviews, I transcribed the interviews verbatim. Secondary data sources were field notes, including my initial observations during each interview and memos created during the analysis process (Prasad, 2018). No participants responded with edits during member checking.

Data were analyzed using a thematic and comparative analysis method to generate codes. I used an inductive approach to identify patterns and themes, using literal words or language from the participants (Saldana, 2021). From this analysis, I ultimately identified ten themes that yielded insights into the skills and approaches coaches used in developing more inclusive leaders and what coaches say are the challenges and benefits of using coaching to develop DEIB competencies and readiness in leaders. Specifically, for research question one, five themes emerged regarding coaching strategies, methods, and

frameworks used for DEIB development. They are as follows: 1) Create a safe space; 2) Explore the "why" behind DEIB; 3) Use assessments; 4) Expand leaders's intercultural awareness; and 5) Focus on leader impact and power. For the second research question, three salient themes were identified concerning how coaches experienced and navigated the challenges and successes of DEIB coaching: 1) A growth mindset is needed; 2) Coaching makes DEIB training relevant; and 3) Managing resistance and personal safety. The final two themes relate to both research questions: 1) Coaches build self-awareness and recognize personal biases; and 2) Engage in ongoing self-development.

Table 5.1

Summary of Findings

Sections	Themes and Categories
Coaching strategies and methods used for DEIB development	1. Create a safe space a. Suspend judgment b. Practice empathy 2. Explore the "Why" behind DEIB 3. Use Assessments 4. Expand leaders' intercultural awareness a. Using storytelling and history 5. Focus on leader impact and power
Navigating challenges and establishing boundaries for successful DEIB coaching	6. A growth mindset is needed 7. Coaching makes DEIB training relevant 8. Managing resistance and safety
Reflexivity and continuous self-development for DEIB coaches	9. Coaches build self-awareness and recognize personal biases 10. Engage in ongoing self-development

Conclusions and Discussion

From the study's findings, I derived two significant conclusions about using coaching for DEIB to develop more inclusive leaders. First, coaches incorporate a more critical and dynamic approach to their practice to prepare leaders to lead DEIB efforts in their organizations. Within this dynamic approach, there are four critical components to help navigate success with DEIB coaching. The second conclusion is that ultimately, "we are always at choice," where coaches choose to attend to their biases and limitations while fostering resilience and their safety through self-management or reflexivity practices. This conclusion indicates responsible practice in DEIB coaching.

Coaches Incorporate a More Critical and Dynamic Model to Their Coaching Practice When Coaching for DEIB

This study confirmed that coaching used in DEIB training and development coaching has the potential to be a game changer in ensuring successful DEIB professional development. This confirmation is in line with the literature claiming that coaching has the power to impact social change by building critical awareness of hegemonic structures and empowering leaders to realize their impact and potential to affect that social change (Carter, 2023; Gannon, 2021; Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). What is vital to coaching success can lie in the process or methods coaches use in their practice (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018; Linley et al., 2010; Roche & Hefferon, 2013). However, it has been pointed out that there is an abundance of different coaching frameworks and models (Roche & Passmore, 2021), or what Mackie (2014) termed "methodological heterogeneity" (p. 119). These models mostly focus on coaching leaders to drive productivity, such as the GROW, FUEL, or GOOD coaching models. However, limited

empirical research explores the efficacy of specific frameworks or models or ones used specifically for driving DEIB in organizations (Anthony, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Maher & Hastings, 2023; Roche & Passmore, 2021). When the coaches in this study described the coaching frameworks, models, or approaches they used for DEIB, every participant stated that they did not follow one particular model but instead described using a more dynamic approach, incorporating a mix of coaching methods and frameworks, dependent on the client and situation. However, despite the different approaches the participants described using, common, critical components emerged.

This finding of the study revealed that within the context of DEIB development for inclusive leaders, coaches use a dynamic and critical coaching approach that contains four common critical components. I propose these four critical components are part of a dynamic coaching approach that informs a model for DEIB leadership coaching (see Figure 5.2). The four critical components are: (1) Establish a safe space; (2) Explore the "why" and any resistance; (3) Expand cultural humility; and (4) Focus on impact and (em)power(ment). These four critical components of DEIB coaching are rooted in the experiences and coaching practices of the study's participants. Each component is also underpinned by the conceptual and theoretical foundations of critical HRD, which provides the analytical lens through which these practices are interpreted and understood. This dual grounding—empirical and theoretical—reinforces the relevance and rigor of the proposed DEIB coaching model. Moreover, this model outlines a practical approach for critical HRD. In the next section, I discuss each component as related to the findings and the literature.

Figure 5.2

Coaching for Inclusive Leadership Critical Component Model

Establish a Safe Space

Each participant in the study discussed the importance of creating a safe space for leaders to explore deeper issues, feel vulnerable, and engage in uncomfortable, difficult conversations. The concept of a safe space has been both embraced and contested over the last decade. Holley and Steiner (2005) defined safe spaces as environments "in which students are willing and able to participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues" (p. 49). This definition has also been developed to include an environment where participants in the space feel comfortable participating fully without fear of attack or judgment. Arao and Clemens (2013) questioned if feelings of safety were an appropriate expectation to achieve when having an authentic dialogue about DEIB. They argued that "authentic learning about social justice often requires the qualities of risk, difficulty, and controversy that are incompatible with safety" (p. 139). Their reasoning suggests that creating safety would require the prevention of conflict, such as risky and difficult conversations that DEIB can yield. Instead of safety, they suggested an alternative

formulation, drawing from Boostrom's (1998) critique of safe spaces. This alternative to a safe space concept would embrace bravery—or moving from safe space to brave space. While I agree that the concept of safe spaces can be problematic, especially if they are not inclusive or scrutinized, I will continue to use "safe space" in this discussion. For one, it is the language the participants used in this study. Not one used "brave space" or any other alternative. Second, I decided to focus on what the word "safety" implies, which is security. I argue that bravery happens when someone is secure enough to express that bravery and, therefore, may require a safe space.

The participants noted that DEIB topics can evoke strong emotional reactions, and if there is no sense of safety or if there is a fear of judgment, it could lead to resistance and defensiveness. This perspective is aligned with the literature where there is a consensus that coaching, if practiced with intention, can hold a space where clients, and coaches, can disclose and talk openly about vulnerabilities and areas of improvement around DEIB—topics that may feel "too risky" to discuss publicly or openly (Carter et al., 2022; Dreachslin, 2007; Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012). When coachees feel safe or secure in the coaching space, it also allows them to make mistakes (Dreachslin, 2007). Participants in this study also perceived coaching as holding a safe space for leaders to practice failing and receive feedback on how to be resilient. Royal, for example, shared that for the leaders she coached, it was difficult initially for them to admit failure until they felt safe in the coaching space. Indeed, Motsoaledi and Cilliers's (2012) research showed that coachees were more willing to sustain challenging dialogue and process their learning when trust was built between the coach and coachee.

Meeting them where they are. The study participants discussed a myriad of ways in which they would create that safe space, and all agreed that it can be achieved if you start by meeting the client where they are in their stage of DEIB development and mindset. All nine participants discussed the importance of suspending judgment in their practice, focusing on the human side of coaching, and the fact that lived experiences differ from person to person. Another practice is showing empathy and compassion. Participants shared how empathy and compassion are necessary to support the coachee in their vulnerability and discomfort.

Another method most participants used in meeting the client where they are included using assessments, such as multi-rater, DiSC, FIRO-B, or IDI. All but one participant discussed using assessments to provide data to uncover strengths and/or gaps that the coach could leverage and ensure a more holistic approach to the coaching relationship. This data would also help the coachee and ultimately provide a starting point and language the coach and client can share. In her study, Malik (2015) examined the use of assessment tools in the coaching process. She discovered that the use of assessments provided a foundation to aid in the coaching engagement and subsequent learning. The use of assessment data also helped to establish trust in the coaching relationship, where both the coach and coachee felt compelled to invest in the time and effort to facilitate meaningful learning.

However, not every popular coaching assessment will yield trust in the coaching relationship or set the foundation for the coaching space to be safe. There is some disagreement over the efficacy of using mutli-rater, 360-type assessments as an approach to create safety in the coaching relationship. One of the participants described that in her

coaching practice, she has found that the use of multi-rater is not a good practice and diminishes psychological safety. She argued that it is better to first listen and establish trust before bringing in that type of assessment. In a study by Jones et al. (2016), they found that coaching was actually more effective when 360 feedback was excluded from the coaching process. This finding suggests that, in some cases, external assessments—such as feedback from peers, subordinates, and supervisors—may distract from or even undermine the intended safety of being vulnerable. By removing the pressure or bias that can come with this type of data that clients may not be ready or in a mindset yet to process, coaches and clients may be better able to focus on self-directed, more authentic learning and deeper self-awareness.

Explore the "Why" and Resistance

In a critique of Simon Sinek's (2011) *Start With the Why*, Kaoun (2019) argued that one of the benefits of Sinek's suggestion to start with the why is the notion of transformation. Starting with purpose (the why), occurs from the inside out. The author describes this inside-out transformation using purpose as a catalyst for changing perceptions. Kaoun (2019) further explained that "the need to start with purpose, to look at our internal cause, rather than just the results (the What)" (p. 78) is consistent with examples of true systemic changes in organizations around diversity. A commonly cited reason as to why DEIB training is not effective in organizations comes from the why or purpose it is being done in the first place—for performance or to improve the bottom line (Hite & McDonald, 2010; Shoukry, 2016; Shoukry & Cox, 2018). Diversity for performance or for increased profitability's sake can actually reinforce and reproduce social inequalities and maintain the status quo rather than create a more equitable and

inclusive culture (Hite & McDonald, 2010; Shoukry, 2016). Indeed, Bierema (2009) argued that diversity in performance reinforces a masculinist perspective and, therefore, privileges performance over social justice. When the reasons for diversity initiatives are presented as affecting better performance or increasing the bottom line, it also places DEIB as a commodity, slipping into the commodification of employees. Moreover, the impact of diversity initiatives for these reasons can then give an appearance that DEIB is happening and stop it from happening (Ahmed, 2012).

Critical HRD calls for examining organizational practices and structures that reinforce inequities (Fenwick, 2005) and advancing alternatives to encourage DEIB (Collins, 2012). The participants in the study described exploring the why behind DEIB as pivotal in motivating leaders toward transformational action. It also helped their clients recognize their role and potential influence in making change and fostering an inclusive, more equitable culture. The participants have also seen how the why has changed for their clients after sessions using critical reflection and exploration of purpose. Sometimes exploring the why over multiple coaching sessions can engage the learner to see alternate options, prompting a perspective shift. The participants all described using some form of critical reflection. O'Neil and Marsick (2007) have discussed how reflection is significant to learning. This process can help clients explore their own beliefs and values behind their "why" and thus question and further explore underlying assumptions (Sabie-Aridi & Burrell, 2022). This exploration of the why behind DEIB for the coaching client aids in what the study's participants identified as making coaching DEIB more relevant to the client. Indeed, the participants also disclosed that when their clients start to question their underlying assumptions and beliefs, resistance and sometimes defensiveness occur.

Explore and Challenge Resistance. Resistance is not inherently a bad thing and can be productive when explored in the coaching space. Wiggins-Romesburg and Githens (2018) described resistance as a natural reaction to change. Therefore, it should be expected and acknowledged when it happens. The participants in the study described resistance using terms such as tension or defensiveness, and that they helped the clients explore that resistance to understand its origin. They described their actions as being curious as to what is happening in that moment. Romesburg and Githens (2018) claimed that as coaches: "if we fail to consider resistance, we may unintentionally provoke anger and greater resistance" (p. 187), which would then potentially damage any progress or cause regression.

Expand Cultural Humility

This study's findings showed that expanding a leader's cultural awareness was a strategy constantly employed when coaching for DEIB. The common intent for cultural awareness was to develop the leader's ability and confidence to lead across diverse contexts and lead diverse teams. Indeed, a core element of critical HRD encourages researchers and practitioners to consider how they define diversity and inclusion, meaning what does that include or not include, and what are the practices and policies in place that may limit how organizations think about diversity or create the conditions for multiple ways of knowing, being, and thinking are celebrated or even dismissed (Bierema, 2009; Collins 2012). This rethinking of what diversity and inclusion means and who it is for challenges us to expand our cultural humility as HRD, coaching, and learning and development researchers and practitioners.

Cultural humility versus cultural competence. There is a distinct difference between cultural humility and cultural competence, even though cultural competence is sometimes used to mean both. The participants in the study used the term cultural competence, but the findings revealed that cultural humility is a more accurate description of how it is used through coaching for more inclusive leaders. Even though there are differences, cultural competence is difficult to define (Sue 2001; Yeager & Baur-Wu, 2013). This difficulty may be from the considerable variations of how its defined (Lau & Rodgers, 2021) to the lack of a "conceptual framework for organizing its multifaceted dimensions" (Sue, 2001); what is agreed on is its importance. Sue (2001) proposed a multidimensional model of cultural competence (MDCC) to define it. The MDCC defines cultural competency using three primary dimensions: racial and cultural-specific competence, cultural knowledge, and foci of cultural competence (Sue, 2001). This framework implies that skills, knowledge, and awareness are needed. A critique of cultural competency, viewed as acquiring the skills, knowledge, and awareness, also implies that it is a technical problem to be solved, and focuses on learning about the other as opposed to self-awareness. Yeager and Baur-Wu (2013) suggested that this approach to understanding cultural competency has the potential to promote stereotyping.

Like cultural competency, cultural humility has also been used in a variety of contexts (Foronda et al., 2016). The concept stemmed from health care research and literature, where Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1988) proposed it as an alternative to traditional competency models used to train health care works to respectfully deliver care to an increasingly diverse population. They defined cultural humility as

> Incorporating a life-long commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing the power imbalances in the patient-physician dynamic, and to developing mutually beneficial and nonpaternalistic clinical and advocacy partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations (p. 123).

Tervalon and Murray-Garcia's (1988) definition implies a more critical approach beyond developing skills or knowledge in an area. Instead, the concept of cultural humility incorporates the self through discovery and reflection. Moreover, it involves a potential for perspective transformation and critical call to acknowledge and question power dynamics. This concept aligns more with a critical coaching approach that facilitates critical consciousness to aid leaders in that perspective shift about themselves and the communities in which they lead or serve (Shoukry, 2016).

The study's findings suggested that the participants's use of coaching incorporated self-reflection activities, such as visualization, storytelling, and history, as a way to help leaders be more critically aware of assumptions and expectations about the self and others. For instance, Bachar's approach to expanding cultural humility is asking the coachee to consider being more curious about the coachee's team and to show up as a co-learner. He demonstrated different types of questions he asks clients: "How do you create that space where people feel like you're considering them? How do you get to know them? How do you let them get to know you?" This line of questioning engages the coachee in self-reflection and possible bias-awareness. It also aids the coachee to think about how she is approachable as a leader and to consider how power dynamics may affect the leader-direct report relationship.

Focus on Leader (Em)power(ment) and Impact

Power and empowerment are central to any critical framework, especially coaching leaders. A theme of the study illustrated this point, where the findings showed that DEIB coaches incorporate some methods to help leaders build more awareness of how they impact others and the organization through their actions, influence, and power. Willow, for example, shared that one of her approaches to coaching DEIB is guiding the leader to do critical self-reflection to understand "the gap that exists between who we are, who we think we are, how we actually show up in spaces, and what our oppressive muscle memory looks like" and how it also impacts [others]. Power and empowerment are important objects of analysis of critical HRD, including as it exists in coaching and individual learning (Brookfield, 2014; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020; Rocco et al., 2023), as well as how power operates in working relationships and in the organization, at a micro and macro level (Brookfield, 2014). An essential aspect of a critical approach to coaching is to uncover and explore how power dynamics can reinforce how privileging one group's interests, values, and ideas can result in oppressing other groups (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). The participants in the study discussed using coaching to focus on these power dynamics, especially how these dynamics are at play with the coachee's team. For example, Sally referred to her approach in helping leaders critically reflect and understand where they may be inadvertently exerting control or silencing others—how the power dynamic that exists in the leader-direct report relationship is impacting that relationship. This critical approach, helping the coachee realize the power dynamics at play and its impact, has the potential then to empower that coachee to make a change.

This empowerment can also prompt the coachees to assess more critically what other structures or systems may impact the team in a way that exerts control and silences them, and then make necessary changes. This critical assessment can also help coachee's reflect on their own privileges and how these reiterate power dynamics. A much-cited definition of privilege describes it as "unearned advantages enjoyed by a particular group because of membership in that group" (Swigonski, 1996, p. 153). For example, critical coaching would help leaders understand their positional privilege because of the authority associated with their organizational role and hierarchy. Leaders can also have additional privilege based on membership with a dominant identity, for instance, those leaders who are white, heterosexual, and male. However, leaders's membership based on identity can also cause a double bind. Bierema et al.'s (2022) critical feminist approach encourages coaching practitioners to reflect on privilege to help some leaders, white women leaders for example, see themselves as "engaged in contested power relations" (p. 261) where they are members of a historically privileged group based on race (white) while historically marginalized because of gender (woman). The participants in the study also discussed their experiences coaching leaders navigating this double bind to feel empowered as a leader when they may also be experiencing the impact of racist or sexist organizational structures. Beth, for example, described this as "coaching the gap." She explained: "if you don't feel like you belong, then you will always feel like you're in a state of disempowerment. So the idea is how do you shift someone from powerless or disempowered to empowered, and coaching the gap is what [I'm] referring to." Bachar also shared how difficult it is for leaders to create conditions for belonging and safety if they feel disempowered or if they feel like they do not belong. Bierema et al. (2022)

argued that by coaching leaders to understand and reflect on these "paradoxes of privilege within a social context" (p. 262) can help that leader with strategies to affect change.

Power is not inherently a bad thing that only exerts control over something or works to privilege one group over another. Foucault theorized power as being multi-faceted and inherent in all human relations; it is exercised between individuals and can be productive when considering how power works between individuals (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2018; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020; Rocco et al., 2023). Essentially, we are all simultaneously experiencing and exerting power. Critical coaching facilitates this learning by co-constructing understanding with the coachee, which has implications for empowerment.

We are Always at Choice

The second conclusion derived from the study's findings is that DEIB coaches hold what could be argued as a paradox to attend to their potential biases and limitations while fostering resilience, safety, and humanity through reflexive practices and continual learning. Sally, one of the study's participants, shared her thoughts about the challenges of DEIB coaching:

> We are all always at choice. Always. And so remembering that with a client who might feel powerless, we're always at choice. And you have that as a coach, too. I can make a choice to lean into my assumptions and biases or I can make a choice to fight against them and push them aside and open my heart and mind to my client in a way that is very much in the DEIB space.

Sally emphasized that DEIB coaches, like the leaders they coach, are not immune to biases. By stating that coaches have a choice, Sally suggested that it is the coach's responsibility to determine how they approach the leader-client dynamic and the coaching relationship. The acknowledgment of “at choice” also indicated a deliberate, active effort to confront biases rather than ignore them. The study’s findings revealed that DEIB coaches can experience multiple tensions when engaging in DEIB coaching. These tensions are numerous. In addition to understanding and managing their own biases while coaching someone to do the same, another challenge exists for coaches who belong to historically marginalized groups and who are often called upon to take on the responsibility of DEIB work. There is tension in coaching someone who has expressed racist, sexist, or homophobic thoughts or actions that conflict with the coach's own humanity. The phrase “we are always at choice,” expressed by Sally, was a sentiment echoed by many coaches in this study as they shared these tensions, particularly while working as coaches in the current political climate where DEIB initiatives face increasing opposition from federal and state levels. Indeed, Shoukry and Cox (2018) stated that there “is inherent tension in the three-way contract which exists between coach, coachee, and the organization” (p. 418), meaning that there are sometimes spoken and often unspoken expectations of whose interests are to be served. The authors also noted that this three-way relationship could extend to other stakeholders, pointing to complex power dynamics (p. 418). All these tensions reveal a complex, multi-layered paradox in coaching for DEIB and social justice within organizations that are part of a system actively working against DEIB and social justice. Moreover, research has shown that the coaching industry shows a neutral stance on social issues (Maher & Hastings, 2023)

Paradox

Understanding the concept of paradox can help us critically analyze these tensions and strategize how to navigate them effectively. Smith and Lewis (2011) defined paradox as

> Contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time. This definition highlights two components of paradox: (1) underlying tensions—that is, elements that seem logical individually but inconsistent and even absurd when juxtaposed—and (2) responses that embrace tensions simultaneously. (p. 382)

This definition of paradox indicates that these tensions are ongoing and are not to be immediately solved. Instead, the tensions are accepted as inherent and inevitable. Emerson and Lewis (2019) discussed paradox as polarity and defined it as "a situation in which two interdependent and seemingly contradictory states must be maintained for success over time" (p. 8). They stated that polarity and paradox are often used interchangeably, especially in the fields of change management and business. Their definition is more action-oriented, suggesting a more empowered approach to maintaining it rather than just embracing it.

Attending to personal biases and limitations as a coach

We all have biases, and many of us fail to understand how they shape our daily interactions. they can pervade our thoughts and reasoning in an unconscious manner, which is called implicit bias (Bierema, 2020). The participants in this study all acknowledged attending to personal biases when coaching for DEIB to avoid reinforcing the exact inequalities and negative impact of the coach-coachee power dynamic they are

working to dispel. Maher and Hastings (2023) pointed out that coaches are committed to addressing and challenging bias. The participants in the study support this commitment. Bachar, for example, discussed his practice of identifying his core beliefs and how it may influence his interactions and reactions. Coaches should increase their awareness and practice self-reflection about their biases and how they impact their coaching practices and methods (Gannon, 2021; Maher & Hastings, 2023). For instance, becoming aware of how biases and assumptions can impact a coach's choice of question or method. Participants also highlighted the importance of knowing their own triggers and, therefore, enacting self-management or self-reflection skills when they are with a client who may trigger them.

Fostering Resilience and Their Own Safety Through Reflexive Practices

The research findings showed that DEIB coaches navigate the tension between coaching DEIB in an institution that is systematically undermining efforts through policy and cultural norms. Ahmed's (2012) work looked at diversity initiatives in higher education. She argued that often diversity is said to be valued, and these institutions will go through motions to appear progressive, but they fail to make systemic or policy changes that would address privilege and power. The participants in this study supported Ahmed's argument. Willow, for example, identified this tension as "performative organizational wokeness" and the institute had "gotten really good at the song and dance . . . mimicking the concerned looks," suggesting a performance of diversity.

All the coaches who identified as Black in this study expressed the tension of experiencing racial bias while coaching against racial bias, expressing the emotional exhaustion stemming from navigating this tension. Carter et al. (2022) claimed that Black

women coaches, especially after the 2020 racial reckoning, experienced emotional fatigue when coaching and facilitating about race, when they, themselves, had no outlet to talk and process their experiences of feeling the same oppression as their Black clients. The study's participants shared their self-coaching process to remain resilient and present during the coaching session, including mindfulness exercises. Bachar, who is a Black man, also expressed his use of exploring the "why" with himself as self-coaching to mitigate the challenge of balancing his role and commitment as a coach and helping someone who has expressed racist tendencies. Carter et al. (2022) discussed the coping strategy of armouring, "an adaptive mechanism for coping with racial oppression" (p. 20), which includes mentally preparing or emotionally regulating oneself for a possible confrontation, similar to Petra's mindfulness practices. Another example is setting firm boundaries, like saying "no" to potential clients. Reflexivity and reliance skills are usually not part of the coaching curriculum, and neither is learning about the macro and micro systems that hinder DEIB progress; therefore, part of this study's conclusion is that ongoing professional learning is critical for meaningful coaching, which helps develop more inclusive and brave leaders to affect systemic and cultural change.

In summary, the conclusions of this study included: (1) that coaches incorporate a more critical and dynamic approach to their practice to prepare leaders to lead DEIB efforts in their organizations. Within this dynamic approach, there are four critical components to help navigate success with DEIB coaching; and (2) "we are always at choice": there is a paradox that exists in DEIB coaching where coaches must attend to their personal biases and limitations while fostering resilience and their own safety through self-coaching practices. These conclusions were grounded by the findings of the

study and discussed using a critical HRD lens.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The implications of this study are derived from the findings, interpretations, and current literature on coaching, critical HRD, and inclusive leadership development. In this section, I will discuss the theoretical and practical implications and provide recommendations for future research. This research study moves towards developing a better, more critical understanding of how coaching is used to develop more inclusive leaders who are critically conscious, brave, and capable of advancing DEIB in their organizations. The study also aimed to understand how these coaches perceived and experienced the challenges and successes of DEIB coaching. I used higher education as a specific setting to situate the study, but I argue that the study's conclusions can apply to any setting, as all organizations in the United States are currently impacted by the rollbacks and defunding of DEIB initiatives by Federal and State governments.

This study contributes to the field of critical Human Resource Development (HRD) in several ways. For one, it answers the call for more critical research and to expand more critical practices (Bierema, 2020; Kwon & Archer, 2023; Monaghan & Isaac-Savage, 2023). Researchers, practitioners, coaches, and other learning and development professionals must attend to how leaders are developed to lead more inclusively in their organizations. Additionally, we are responsible for understanding more critical coaching methods and how these methods can aid in learning transfer for adult learners and DEIB training.

Coaching to develop leaders' capacity and bravery to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is under-researched and under-developed (Gannon, 2021;

Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012)). Moreover, there is minimal empirical research on the approaches, methods, or processes used in DEIB coaching, as well as an underrepresentation of critical approaches in the coaching literature (Louis & Fatien-Diochon, 2018). This study provides empirical research for advancing an approach to DEIB coaching. From the findings and conclusions of the study, I proposed a four-component dynamic coaching approach that makes up a model for DEIB leadership coaching. The four critical components are: (1) Establish a safe space; (2) Explore the "why?" and any resistance; (3) Expand cultural humility; and (4) Focus on impact and (em)power(ment). These four critical components of DEIB coaching are grounded in the actual practice of the study's participants and supported by the critical HRD conceptual and theoretical framework. Therefore, this study advances a practical application of critical HRD. Additionally, it informs and supports practitioners in navigating the complexities of DEIB coaching and its insights, thus informing coaching learning and education.

Implications for Future Research

This dissertation seeks to advance an understanding of how coaching is used to advance DEIB in organizations and to develop more inclusive leaders. Limited empirical research explores the efficacy of specific coaching frameworks or models or ones used specifically for driving DEIB in leadership development (Anthony, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Maher & Hastings, 2023; Roche & Passmore, 2021). Though this study provides insight into the abilities, knowledge, capacities, and methods for DEIB coaching, more research is needed. With that consideration, I recommend

1. A study measuring the efficacy of specific models or methods used in DEIB coaching and its impact on leaders and the organization in affecting systemic change could provide key insights into how to develop others for impactful DEIB coaching. These insights could also impact well-established coaching competencies like the ICF competencies.
2. More research is needed to explore best practices for navigating the tensions or paradoxes of DEIB coaches or practitioners experiencing bias while coaching against bias in organizations that do not challenge or change systemic causes of discrimination and inequities. The insights of this study could inform coaching learning and education.

Study Limitations

Every study has inherent limitations, no matter the care taken in design and deployment (Bloomberg, 2023), and my study was no exception. In my study, one limitation was the lack of gender diversity among the participants—eight out of the nine identified as women, and one identified as a man. The gender difference in this study is significantly higher than the 72% of coaches who identify as women, according to the International Coaching Federation (ICF) (2023). Indeed, it should be pointed out that a limitation of the ICF's report is that they did not account for other genders or those who identified as non-binary, and my sample lacked this representation as well. The gender makeup of my study's sample size of nine could be a factor in how I recruited for the study using a purposeful sampling method. Most participants came from my network, and I made every attempt to be as inclusive as possible when recruiting research participants. Another limitation regarding my sample was that the study was limited to the coaches'

experiences and did not investigate the effects of coaching on the leader/coachee experiences.

Lastly, another limitation was my potential bias as a researcher due to my professional background in coaching, DEIB training, and leadership development. I would make sure those biases and my own opinions about the research did not come into the interviews or analysis. I regularly kept a research journal and reflected on my own values and experiences. Additionally, I would intentionally set aside assumptions and approach the interviews with openness and curiosity, using the semi-structured interview guide and revising any potentially leading questions.

Conclusion

Beth, one of the participants in this study, exclaimed that integrating coaching and DEIB together was the game changer for her practice. Other participants also expressed this sentiment in one way or another during the interviews. Indeed, the success of integrating coaching with training further supports the literature discussing this potential as a way to address issues of learning transfer in one-off training as well (Bright & Crockett, 2012; Carter, 2023; Jones et al., 2016; Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Simpson, 2010). This study highlighted how coaching is used as a game-changer when it comes to DEIB to develop more inclusive leaders in higher education. It also aimed to explore how these coaches discussed the challenges and successes of using coaching as a critical method to help leaders engage more bravely and effectively with diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in their organizations. Admittedly, the coaching industry has been called out for its neutrality on social issues (Haher & Hastings, 2023) and how it can be used to reinforce the status quo rather than challenge it

(Bierema et al., 2022; Gannon, 2021). I used a theoretical and conceptual critical human resource development (HRD) framework to analyze the findings and assess the extent to which these methods were critical. Additionally, I explored how they align with critical HRD's focus on challenging ideological practices, advancing alternatives to promoting inclusion, and questioning power structures and imbalances. The study revealed four critical components coaches use in a dynamic approach—1) Establish a safe space, 2) Explore the "why" and resistance, 3) Expand cultural humility, and 4) Focus on (em)power(ment) and impact. The study also revealed a paradox when coaching for DEIB that coaches attend to personal biases and limitations while fostering resilience and safety through reflexivity practices. Although this is one study about nine coaching professionals doing DEIB work in higher education, my hope is that it will help other researchers and practitioners understand what is needed for impactful, critical DEIB coaching, as well as the experiences of coaches doing the practice. I also hope that it will inspire much-needed research and practices as we navigate further challenges and changes to DEIB and social justice.

AFTERWORD

As I revise this dissertation, I find it challenging to keep up with the political headlines coming across my news feed and decide how to include these as they shape the research context. The frequency of such headlines makes it difficult to stay abreast of the ongoing changes and impact. The news shows that higher education continues to experience rapid change with its DEIB efforts. United States politics escalated its efforts against DEIB, putting pressure on higher education institutes to comply with changes or risk losing funding. For example, Georgia politicians advanced House Bill 127 (HB127) through its Senate, proposing to withhold state funding from public schools and universities with DEI policies, programs, or initiatives (Georgia Bill to ban DEI, 2025). The United States Education Department has warned public schools and universities to eliminate their DEIB programs or risk losing federal funding (Mehta, 2025). In response to this, the University of Michigan announced that it would choose to shut down its DEI offices (University of Michigan, 2025). The President of the United States has threatened to freeze more than half a billion dollars in grant money at Brown University due to the University's DEIB policies and responses to student protests (Waldenberg et al., 2025). Unfortunately, these threats or even the mere fear of these threats have caused other higher education institutes and leaders to choose what is referred to as anticipatory obedience or complying before any pressure to do so (Against anticipatory obedience, 2025).

The headlines highlight the trend of universities rolling back DEIB efforts or

reframing DEIB in more neutral terms. This trend also exemplifies how DEIB has become so contested and polarizing at this current time. These rollbacks and neutrality can have disastrous effects for historically underrepresented groups, such as loss of support and resources. DEIB in higher education is at a point where it is heavily influenced by politics, and it produces a counternarrative about DEIB—painting it as the enemy of democracy, anti-American, and the cause of a cultural and societal downfall. This counternarrative is being reinforced by compliant reactions from higher education institutes not taking a stand.

Indeed, a major concern for analysis in critical HRD is how "dominant ideologies educate people to believe certain ways of organizing society are in their own best interests when the opposite is true" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 30). The counternarrative of DEIB that is being reinforced through the current political climate is serving a particular interest in making something unjust, such as banning DEIB, look beneficial. But the question remains, for whom is it benefitting? A critical theoretical concern of understanding how knowledge is intrinsically linked to power and control (and the potential for liberation) and a practical application of that critical concern seem all too apt and needed during this anxious time of uncertainty for organizations and for the people under scrutiny for doing DEIB work. Merriam and Bierema (2014) posed that critical theory aids researchers and practitioners in three important ways: by providing (1) "a framework for critiquing social conditions; (2) a way to challenge ideology; and (3) seeking emancipation and eliminating oppression (p. 215), and it has guided this dissertation about coaching leaders to be better with DEIB and to understand why it is beneficial to organizations. Certainly, coaching alone will not overcome the challenges

imposed on advancing DEIB in organizations, but it can be a useful strategy in helping leaders make difficult choices in doing the right thing, even if it costs us. Indeed, Gannon (2021) stated that coaching could be used to reinforce the status quo, or it could be used to challenge it. I do believe that coaching has the potential to encompass both the theoretical concern and the practical application of critical HRD in helping organizations and leaders be more just, and I agree with other proponents of coaching that it can change society when practiced more critically (Bierema et al., 2022; Gannon, 2021; Shoukry, 2017). As critical HRD researchers, practitioners, coaches, and leaders who develop other leaders, we are always at choice.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Prospective Research Participant,

I invite you to participate in a study to explore and understand how learning and development professionals use coaching to influence leaders' ability to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) within the higher education context.

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia in the Department of Learning, Leadership and Organizational Development. I am currently in the data collection phase of my dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Laura Bierema.
The main criteria for selecting individuals to participate in the study include those who identify as learning and development professionals and who have engaged in leadership development coaching for DEIB initiatives to develop more inclusive leaders within a higher education context.

If you would be willing to participate in the study, it will involve participation in a survey and one confidential sixty (60) minute individual interview with me (virtual or in-person). Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. The involvement in the study is voluntary, and participants may choose to stop at any time. All data collected during the interview will be strictly confidential. Every attempt will be made to keep identity protected using pseudonyms. The results of the research study may be published, but no other individually-identifiable information provided during the course of the research will be shared.

The potential benefits of participating in this study include informing the theory and practice of using coaching in leadership development to develop more inclusive leaders. Ultimately, my goal is for this research to help learning and development professionals effectively intervene to coach and educate leaders on how to lead skillfully and effectively DEIB initiatives and embrace the bravery, vulnerability, and accountability necessary to make sustainable changes that promote organization justice.

If you have any questions about this research project, would like to participate, or can recommend someone who meets the study criteria, please respond to rachel.watts@uga.edu no later than XX, 2023.

Thank you for your consideration in helping to contribute to the study and the field of coaching and leadership development.

Rachel Watts
Doctoral candidate
University of Georgia

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

The purpose of this study is to understand how learning and development professionals use coaching to influence leaders' ability to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in organizations. The following research questions guide the study:

1. How has coaching been used as a DEIB intervention for leadership development in higher education organizations?
2. How do learning and development professionals discuss the challenges and successes of using coaching to develop more inclusive leaders?

Name of Participant:

_____

Date of Interview:

_____

Time of Interview: Start: _____ End: _____

Location of Interview:

_____

*Interview questions are to be used as a guide and for probing participants for greater clarification and illicit deeper responses. Not all questions may be asked of each participant.

A. **Background Information**

    1. How long have you been coaching?
    2. What certifications do you have?

B. **Research Question #1** – How has coaching been used as a DEIB intervention in leadership development

    3. Please describe how you have used coaching .
    4. What motivated you to incorporate coaching as part of a DEIB strategy for leadership development?
    5. Tell me about your general approach to using coaching.
    6. Tell me about what coaching techniques you find useful in advancing DEIB.
    7. How do you measure the effectiveness of these coaching techniques?

3. **Research Question #2** – How do learning and development professionals discuss the challenges and successes of using coaching to develop more inclusive leaders?

B.

    1. Please describe your experience with coaching leaders for DEIB objectives.
    2. What self-reflection or professional development do you engage in to enhance your ability to deliver DEIB-focused coaching?
    3. ?
    4. Tell me about your most challenging experience coaching DEIB for leaders.
    5. Tell me about your most successful experience coaching DEIB.

C. **Conclusion**

    1. What else would you like to share about your experiences using coaching as an intervention in leadership development for DEIB objectives?

2. Is there anything else you would like to discuss that I have not covered you think would help me understand the use of coaching as a leadership development intervention to advance DEIB?

APPENDIX C

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Name:	
Preferred Pseudonym:	
Age:	
Sex:	
Race/Ethnic background:	
Education: (list all degrees earned)	
# of years of learning and development experience:	
# of years coaching:	
# of years coaching and/or training DEIB content:	
# of years working in higher education:	
Certifications related to L&D, coaching, and/or DEIB: (Specify certification and organization who issued it)	

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Coaching Inclusive Leaders: A Critical HRD Study of Advancing DEIB in the Workplace

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Laura Bierema
LEAP – COE
bierema@uga.edu

Co-Investigator: Rachel Watts
LEAP - COE
rw90858@uga.edu

We are doing this research study to learn more about how learning and development professionals use coaching to influence and develop leaders' ability to advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in organizations. Specifically, we are interested in your experiences using coaching as an inclusive leadership program intervention.

You are being invited to be in this research study because of your professional experience as a learning and development professional who uses coaching in your practice.

If you agree to participate in this study, we will use a semi-formal interview structure to talk about your experiences using coaching in leadership development to develop more inclusive leaders. You may also be asked to participate in small focus-group discussions. Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. You and Rachel Watts will decide together how many interviews you will have and when they will occur.

You do not have to share any information that you are not comfortable sharing, and you can stop participating in the conversations at any time. Your responses may help us understand how coaching is used as a leadership development intervention to help develop leaders who can lead skillfully and effectively DEIB initiatives.

We will be careful to keep your information confidential, and we will ask you and all the focus group members to keep the discussion confidential as well. We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could accidentally be disclosed to people not connected to the research. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept secure. The files will be encrypted and password protected. We will use pseudonyms in place of actual names to further ensure confidentiality.

After we complete the interviews and focus groups, we will remove anything that identifies you. The recordings will be destroyed after the transcription is complete. We may continue to use the de-identified transcripts and may share them with other researchers for future studies.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Laura Bierema, 706-248-5290, or email bierema@uga.edu If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Please keep this letter for your records.