

Problems with Research by Organizational Scholars on Issues of Race and Ethnicity*

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Despite a growing need for knowledge about the effects of race and ethnicity in organizations, relatively little research on these issues has been performed and few research reports have been published in the major management journals. A literature review and a survey of authors in the field indicate that factors responsible for this problem fall into two categories: factors limiting the amount of work done on these issues, and factors hindering the publication of completed work. Underlying many of these factors is the tendency for the effects of personal biases among authors, reviewers, and editors to be especially severe with respect to this topic. Moreover, issues of racioethnic relations and heterogeneity, including the problem of racism, have never really been resolved in American society generally. Following an analysis of the problems, suggestions are provided to aid scholars in effectively conducting and evaluating research on this topic.

INTRODUCTION

The report *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century* (Johnston & Packer, 1987) has spurred a desire to know more about how racial and ethnic diversity in the work force affects organizational behavior and effectiveness. As the composition of work groups becomes increasingly ethnically diverse, the assumption that knowledge about organizational issues compiled almost exclusively by white

men using white subjects applies equally well to nonwhites is increasingly inappropriate. Many writers have recently noted, though, that despite the growing need for understanding the effects of ethnic and racial heterogeneity on organizations, the knowledge base for these issues is appallingly limited (Cox & Nkomo, in

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press; Ilgen & Youtz, 1986; Alderfer & Thomas, 1988).

Reviews of the literature on race and ethnicity in the organizational context, and anecdotal evidence drawn from conversations with writers in the organization behavior field, have led to several interrelated questions.

1. Why has relatively little theory and research on race and ethnicity been discussed in the management journals?
2. Are special circumstances indigenous to research on race and ethnicity hindering the development of high-quality research on this topic?
3. What steps could scholars take in their roles as writers, reviewers, and editors to improve the probability that the findings of high-quality research on race and ethnicity are published in the management journals?

This article addresses these three questions as it discusses issues and obstacles that have hindered the development of research on race and ethnicity in the organizational context, and offers suggestions toward overcoming some of these obstacles.

The absence of research reports of the effects of race and ethnicity is especially noticeable in those publications frequently cited as the leading journals of the field. For example, in a recent review of articles on race issues, Nkomo and I (Cox & Nkomo, in press) found that of the 11,804 articles published in 16 leading management journals from 1971 to 1989, only 201 address issues of race or ethnicity. This same set of journals published 313 articles on international issues, 426 on issues of age, and 1,306 on issues of gender. Moreover, a majority of the published articles on race and ethnicity—54%—focus on either hiring decisions or equal opportunity/affirmative action. As for the few other subjects to which a significant number of articles are devoted—job atti-

tudes, performance evaluation, and motivation—the results reported are inconsistent and contradictory (see reviews by Bartol, Evans, & Stith, 1978; Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1982; Kraiger & Ford, 1985). We also found that in the journals reviewed the rate of publication for research findings on race and ethnicity declined markedly from a level of 11.7 per year in the 1970s to one of less than 4 per year from 1985–1989.

SURVEY OF AUTHORS

To get a perspective on the problem of why so little work on race and ethnicity has appeared in the management literature, and on the related questions listed above, I contacted 75 scholars who have each written two or more papers on race or ethnicity during the past two decades and asked them a series of 12 questions about their experiences as they conducted their research. I received useable responses from 36 of these scholars, and interviewed one-third of them. Of the respondents, 21 are white, 12 are black, 2 are Asian, and 1 is Hispanic.

In preparing this article, I drew on data obtained from these 36 writers, from a review of relevant literature on research methods and journal review processes, and from my own thinking to conduct an analysis of the three questions posed above. Throughout the article I focus on issues and obstacles I consider unique or particularly salient to research on race and ethnicity versus research on other topics in the organizational sciences domain.

Key Terms and Parameters

I wish to aid the readers by defining several key terms and parameters relevant to my analysis. I start by considering the term "race" and its relationship to the term "ethnicity." Several writers have noted that historically race has been used primarily to refer to biological differences among groups, whereas ethnicity has been used

to refer to cultural differences (Alba & Chamblin, 1983; Alderfer & Thomas, 1988). Although the distinction between biological and cultural differences is an important one, the tendency in the past to attach these terms to particular groups (for example, referring to whites and blacks in terms of "race" and to Hispanics and Asians in terms of "ethnicity") seems inappropriate. Such attachments imply that a group is either biologically or culturally distinct from another, whereas it generally is both.

Because of such concerns, and to avoid continuously repeating a long, awkward phrase, I introduce the term "racioethnic" to refer to biologically and/or culturally distinct groups. In this article the term "racioethnic research" refers to the generation of academic theory and empirical work on the racioethnic-group identities of people. This includes research that addresses one or more minority racioethnic groups—without necessarily comparing one group to another—and research that examines the effects of racioethnicity and racioethnic differences on human behavior.

I also wish to note that, although racioethnic issues have been studied rather extensively in the sociology and social-psychology literature, this article focuses on the treatment of these issues in the field of organization behavior (OB). The publication of work on issues of racioethnicity in OB has been quite meager compared to that published in other disciplines.

Finally, I emphasize that the under-representation of Asian, Hispanic, and Native American scholars among my survey subjects, as well as the limited treatment of racioethnic groups other than blacks and whites in the literature, resulted in my having little data on or examples for these groups. Thus, although I believe that the arguments of this article probably apply to research on racioethnic issues in general, I am most confident of their veracity for research on blacks and whites. I recognize that their applicability to other racioethnic groups is open to question.

Having defined the parameters, I present the analysis in three segments. The first segment addresses problems involving the amount of research done on racioethnic issues, the second addresses issues affecting the publication of reports of racioethnic research, and the third offers conclusions and suggestions to aid authors, reviewers, and editors in effectively conducting and evaluating research on this topic.

FACTORS LIMITING THE AMOUNT OF RESEARCH

Factors limiting the amount of high-quality research on racioethnic issues produced fall into two primary categories: the lack of scholars actively working on these issues, and methodological considerations making the work particularly difficult to perform.

A Dearth of Researchers

Several unique factors may be unduly restricting the number of scholars doing research on racioethnic issues. One is that white Americans generally do not consider racioethnicity a topic of universal importance. Many still treat it as "a minority issue"—that is, a matter relevant only to minority group members. My survey of scholars produced several findings supporting this conclusion.

One writer reported that grant proposals he submits for funding work on racioethnic issues to the National Institutes of Health are routinely referred to the NIH's Center for Minority Affairs for consideration. Even if these referrals are made to improve the probability that such work will be funded, the action suggests that the topic is considered most appropriate for scholars belonging to minority groups and/or is outside of the mainstream of topics evaluated in the NIH's normal review process. Consider also the following comment of an editor of a well known OB journal in response to a request

that he consider a special issue on black professionals:

I think that we would not at this time or in the near future be interested in a special issue that dealt only with the situation of black professionals. Surely that is a crucial matter, but given the diverse readership of [this journal] it might be better to formulate a special issue incorporating papers about Hispanics as well as blacks.

At first glance this comment seems reasonable, and I myself agree totally that we need work on racioethnic issues that involves other groups in addition to blacks and whites. Yet the phrase "given the diverse readership" seems to imply that an interest in research on blacks is limited mainly to black readers, on Hispanics mainly to Hispanic readers, and so forth. In short, the editor has apparently concluded that the audience for articles on racioethnic issues is largely limited to members of the minority racioethnic group under discussion. To the extent that such thinking represents a widespread perspective on or sentiment about the relevance of, breadth of interest in, and identification with racioethnic issues as an important topic for the OB field at large, it surely contributes to a lack of scholars working on this topic.

Another important factor restricting the number of researchers working on racioethnic issues is that scholars from minority groups and majority groups alike are frequently pressured not to do such research, albeit for somewhat different reasons. For example, such pressure is manifested when colleagues and advisors directly discourage doctoral students and faculty members from making racioethnic issues central topics of their research agenda. This conclusion was supported in my survey of authors: Of the 34 respondents who answered the item asking whether they had ever been advised against pursuing racioethnic research, 14 (41%) said they had. This form of pressure appears especially prevalent for scholars from minority groups. Of the 13 respondents from mi-

nority groups, 11 (85%) reported that they had been directly discouraged from doing research on racioethnic issues, whereas of the 21 white scholars only 3 (14%) reported that they had been. A chi square test revealed that this difference was statistically significant ($X^2_{\text{obs}} = 16.56$, $df = 1$; $p < .001$). This suggests a clear interaction effect of the race of the researcher and the reactions of her or his colleagues and mentors to making racioethnic issues prominent in a research agenda.

The following examples from three black survey respondents illustrate the pressure they faced. One respondent whose dissertation focused on a racioethnicity issue said that a faculty member at a school where she underwent interviews asked her, "Why have you chosen to put yourself in a research ghetto?" Another respondent reported that he has been told repeatedly by colleagues that "blacks can't get tenure and do work on race."

A third respondent cited two reasons she has been given as to why she should not pursue research on racioethnicity issues: "research on minorities is alleged to be inferior and only published in second-rate journals," and "no established person has expertise or interest in this area."

A somewhat more subtle factor that may inhibit minority scholars from doing racioethnic research is the fear of being "pigeonholed" and labeled "the minority researcher" on a faculty. Some feel that such labeling contributes to one's being regarded as the resident expert on all minority matters, which tends to hinder one's development of other research interests. At a recent conference of graduate students from minority groups hosted by the University of Michigan, this subject was much debated, and the discussion clearly indicated that most of the scholars present with an interest in research on racioethnic issues had felt at least some concern about "labeling effects."

Another source of concern cited at this con-

ference was that of making racioethnic issues the focal point of one's research agenda versus striving to make it just one of several interests on one's agenda. As the discussion evolved, two independent issues emerged: that of narrowness or overspecialization with respect to one's research topic—which is a common concern of scholars regardless of racioethnic identity or the topic under study—and that of whether or not the implications of the narrowness of one's research agenda are different when the topic is racioethnic issues. Many of the scholars at the conference, as well as those responding to my survey, expressed the belief that specializing in research on racioethnic issues poses risks different from those associated with most other topics. Specifically, they were concerned that work on racioethnic issues is often stigmatized by whites.

One black woman who responded to my survey reported that during a job interview she was asked, "What are your research interests?" When she cited a topic involving racioethnic issues, the interviewer responded, "Surely you must have other interests." The interviewer thus implied that the interviewee's interests are either too narrow, not focused on a suitable topic, or some combination of the two. According to the respondent, the message she got was that because she had an interest in racioethnic issues, she had better also have interests in other areas. To the extent that specialization in research agendas is considered legitimate, racioethnic issues should be as acceptable as any other topic.

All of the concerns noted above contribute to a reluctance among minority scholars to do research on racioethnic issues, and especially to make this the focus of their research programs. Although my limited sample suggests that white scholars are significantly less likely to be subjected to this form of pressure, this does sometimes occur. One white male respondent made the following comment:

As far as I am concerned the pressures not to do race research and the punishment for doing it are clear and severe for white people who do racially sound work.

White scholars who seek to pursue research on racioethnic issues are also often discouraged from doing such work through a different form of pressure, which consists of negative reactions from subjects, scholars belonging to minority groups, and even funding institutions who question the white scholars' legitimacy as researchers on this topic on the basis that they are not minority group members. Several of the white scholars who responded to my survey noted that they had experienced such pressure. I was particularly disturbed by two comments from white male writers who have not actively conducted research on racioethnicity in recent years. One stated,

I was discouraged from pursuing race research because I found it impossible to get cooperation in the local [black] community or from blacks who I asked to collaborate with me on research.

This respondent said he believed that the lack of cooperation primarily stemmed from his race. Another white scholar, who did extensive work on racioethnicity for two decades, said:

I think there is an assumption that funding for this topic should be given to minority social scientists . . . I no longer seek funding for work on this topic on the assumption that I should leave the field to minority social scientists to get into and study.

These quotations clearly indicate that some people have adopted the unfortunate idea that racioethnic issues as topics of social science research should be the exclusive domain of minority scholars. This view is reinforced to some degree even by writers in the field. To understand why minority group members sometimes react negatively to white investigators, one must consider the historical treatment of minority groups in the literature. With respect to blacks' being studied by white social scientists, history has shown the prevalence of an order-

equilibrium model in which the following occurred: behavior observed to deviate from the prevailing dominant culture was characterized as pathological; researchers emphasized the economic deprivation of minorities; and solutions focused on black adaptation to Anglo-American norms (Lavender & Forsyth, 1976; Taylor, 1987). Metzger's (1971, 641-642) comment about sociological research on blacks in the 1960s illustrates this phenomenon:

. . . the sociological emphasis on the pathology of the black community produced a tendency among sociologists in the sixties to view barriers to racial integration as residing in the sociocultural characteristics of the black community itself, rather than in the racism of the dominant society.

Because of this history, one should expect blacks—and perhaps other minority groups—to feel wary of white social science researchers. Nevertheless, seeking to exclude whites from this research domain is an inappropriate reaction to the past shortcomings that can lead to an unaffordable loss of resources for this work.

The above discussion highlights a paradox over who performs research on racioethnic issues, which was made explicit by a white female respondent:

If one is a minority researcher, one is assumed to be biased, but if one is a nonminority, one's legitimacy is questioned.

This is reminiscent of the "insider-outsider" debate exemplified in the writings of Merton (1972) and Jones (1970) and more recently summarized by Alderfer and Thomas (1988). For reasons that I strive to make clear in various segments of this article, it is not only desirable but crucial to have both whites and nonwhites involved in research on racioethnic issues.

I offer one final example of the pressures scholars face that tend to reduce the number of persons working on racioethnic issues. One white respondent reported that although he has never personally been ostracized for doing re-

search on racioethnicity, he has directly observed that doctoral students in his department who are interested in racioethnic issues often cannot assemble a dissertation committee to address the topic. Even more disturbing, he stated that qualified applicants to his university's doctoral program in psychology who express interest in racioethnic issues are often denied admission to the program. A tenured member of the department, this respondent presumably has had the opportunity to be an eyewitness to these occurrences.

Methodological Obstacles

When asked whether they thought that work on racioethnicity is more difficult to perform or to get published than is work on other OB topics, a large majority (70%) of the authors surveyed said "yes." Moreover, a majority (63%) said "yes" to a related question that asked specifically if they thought methodological obstacles existed that are unique or especially indigenous to racioethnic research. I have identified five methods-related factors that increase the difficulty of performing successful research on racioethnic issues:

1. the importance of nontraditional research designs,
2. sample size issues,
3. social desirability effects in data collection,
4. the absence of field cooperation, and
5. the influence of the researcher's racioethnic identity on the research process.

Nontraditional Designs

Several survey respondents argued that research on racioethnic issues is best done with clinical methods, autobiographies, action research, and other designs and methods that are considered nonconventional for mainstream OB. The rationales offered for this include be-

liefs that racioethnic research is inherently biographical and autobiographical, that the complexity of the topic makes surveys and other mass sample methods inappropriate, and that the relative absence of well-established theoretical foundations requires more in-depth data collection to promote theory construction.

The need for using qualitative research designs and for departing from traditional standards of data collection protocol when conducting research on topics such as racioethnicity is supported by the work of Sutton and Schurman (1988). Based on their research on organizational death, they conclude, "Studying [emotionally] hot topics may require abandoning the standard rules of the research game derived from the traditional scientific method" (p. 342).

Sutton and Schurman specifically mention the need for qualitative designs and changes in data collection. For example, they note that conventional methodology calls for interview questions to be standardized for all respondents and for investigators to refrain from disclosing the details of the research objective to respondents. They found that both guidelines were unworkable in their own research, however, and thus followed neither rule. They acknowledge that they made a conscious decision to violate these rules despite the potential effects of bias on the results. They conclude that considerations such as an ability to obtain data and to create an environment of social support in which interviewees will provide candid responses must sometimes take precedence over traditional notions of scientific "objectivity." I believe that their findings are applicable to other emotionally sensitive topics such as racioethnicity, and that they illustrate the need for new paradigms of research methodology.

To the extent that research on racioethnicity requires more qualitative designs and other nonconventional designs, the publication of the findings of such research may have been

hindered in the past by a bias among mainstream journals for more quantitative designs. The presence of this bias seems well supported by even a cursory examination of past issues of journals such as the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Organization Behavior and Human Performance*, and *Administrative Science Quarterly*. In articles published in these journals, the typical sample size for work at the individual level of analysis is several hundred subjects, and data analysis techniques are typically multivariate methods requiring large samples, such as multiple regression, discriminate analysis, and factor analysis. The existence of a bias in favor of these methods and its probable negative effect on publication rates for research on racioethnicity was explicitly acknowledged by several of the survey respondents who were actively reviewing manuscripts for major OB journals.

Sample Size Issues

The relevance of sample size issues is suggested by Kerr, Tolliver, and Petree (1977), who found that 44% of those in a sample of reviewers for 19 leading management journals were biased against accepting for publication manuscripts reporting research based on a sample size of fewer than 30 subjects. Of the reviewers studied, 22% reported that they would reject a paper on this basis alone. In commenting on the data, the authors note that authors seeking to publish works on new theory need statistically significant results or at least "had better use large samples" (p. 138). Such requirements make building new theory on the effects of racioethnicity more difficult.

The bias favoring large samples is problematic not only because of its implications for qualitative research designs, but also because of the small number of nonwhites in many organization populations. Consider the following two examples. When Nkomo and I conducted research on performance appraisals and pro-

motion criteria (Cox & Nkomo, 1986), we received a 100% response rate for all black managers in two of the largest divisions of a municipality. Only 45 black managers were on payroll, however. Our research question required us to limit the responses to ratings of all subordinates of managers with black subordinate managers, leaving us with a total of 125 useable responses. Even though we found some significant differences in the results, an early reviewer of our report of the results (who was working on behalf of a journal other than the one that published the work) commented that "the sample is really too small to do much with."

The second example was provided by an Asian survey respondent who co-wrote a paper about managers belonging to minority groups that was rejected by two of the journals on the list provided by Kerr et al. (1977). Despite the paper's reporting some statistically significant research results, reviewers for both journals criticized the small sample size (fewer than 30 subjects) and cited it as a major reason for rejection. The following excerpt from a letter from one of the authors to the journal's editor typifies the frustration writers on racioethnic effects feel involving this issue.

Yes the sample size for the minority managers is small. However, it represents the proportion of the minority managers in the company and of the larger population. Obtaining a sample of minority managers at this management level is difficult. The significant results that did emerge suggest some processes that may merit further research. I feel the study can make an important and meaningful contribution despite the sample size of the minority managers.

Social Desirability and Field Cooperation

The issues of social desirability effects and field cooperation are related and thus are addressed together.

Although many topics are subject to the effects of social desirability on responses, this

seems to be an especially severe problem for research on racioethnic issues. The social desirability problem reduces the likelihood of finding results indicating an unfavorable bias against minority group members. This is because the civil rights activism of the 1960s and 1970s heightened people's sensitivity to the legal implications of appearing to discriminate on the basis of racioethnicity. As a result, obtaining fully candid replies without using deceptive, or at least unobtrusive techniques, is difficult.

For this and other reasons, many organizations are reluctant to participate in research focusing on racioethnic differences. This reluctance sometimes leads to unusual outcomes. For example, one respondent mentioned a case in which a company agreed to be a study site for a race research project, but later wrote the research team a letter stating that it did not want to be briefed on the results of the study.

Most organizations participating in social science research have concerns about guarantees of anonymity, but for research on racioethnic issues such guarantees are often insufficient. As a result, many writers on racioethnicity—including me—have had difficulty obtaining entree into organizations to do field work.

Influence of the Researcher's Racioethnic Identity

As important as the issues addressed above are, I believe that the influence of the researcher's racioethnic identity on the research process has the most far-reaching effects. A black female respondent framed the overall problem well during my interview with her:

No one, nonwhite or white, can truly maintain emotional distance on the topic of race. Thus, the objectivity assumption of traditional science is very difficult to achieve.

The racioethnic identity of the researcher

can influence research on racioethnic issues in at least three ways. One way involves the research design. For example, my survey data suggest that nonwhite scholars are much more likely than white scholars to prefer nontraditional designs, and to use noncomparative designs (i.e., designs having no white control group).

A second way involves the data collection process. In a recent article on the effects of researcher group membership on research, Kram (1988, p. 253) described problems stemming from her identification with interviewees of the same gender:

I found it quite easy to build rapport [with female interviewees] and to empathize with their personal accounts. The corresponding threat to valid data collection, however, was the degree to which I identified with many of their experiences. Frequently, I found myself pursuing tangents to the predesignated questions because of personal interest in their comments. Or, my strong identification with accounts caused me to project some of my own reactions and experiences rather than listen openly to theirs.

Although Kram's analysis of the effects of her group identification on her own work did not address racioethnic identity, she specifically acknowledges race as another source of identity for which her concerns are applicable.

Alderfer and Tucker (1988) have also reviewed previous research, and provide their own empirical data indicating that an investigator's race bears heavily on how questions are asked and the responses to them. Further evidence of this was uncovered in a recent study of Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans, which found that the racioethnicity of the interviewer affected interviewees' responses to questions involving ethnicity (Reese, Danielson, Shoemaker, Chang, & Hsu, 1986). For example, when interviewed by a Hispanic, Anglos were more likely to disagree with the statement that Mexican Americans are different from other people.

The third way in which the researcher's racioethnic identity affects research on racioethnic issues involves the interpretation of the data. Kram (1988, p. 254) states:

There are many ways to cut the data, and the researcher's perspectives on the world, shaped by his or her group membership, will determine which course is chosen.

I can provide an example of the effects of this type of bias from my own experience. During one research project, I had a tendency—which I attribute mainly to my identification with the black African American group—to doubt any data indicating no differences by race for variables for which I strongly believe such differences indeed exist. I did not feel such doubts about all null findings for the project, but only about those related to variables for which my own experience had led me to form especially strong intuitive conclusions. In particular, I was concerned about the finding that no differences occurred between black and white MBA degree holders as to hierarchical level achieved. Although my co-author and I wrote a paper about the study and submitted it for journal review, I felt much stronger than normal internal pressure to attribute the troublesome finding to measurement problems—certainly more than any I felt for the other results. I had to struggle to overcome this pressure. In such situations it is difficult to view a paper as simply a scientific work in light of the possible impact of publishing such findings on race relations in America that affect me in such a personal way.

Another example of the effects of the researcher's racioethnic identity on the interpretation of results was provided by a white respondent. This respondent related how she and her research partner, who is a minority group member, had difficulty agreeing on whether or not a set of findings indicated racial discrimination. She attributed their different perspectives on the findings to their different racioethnic

identities. In this case, the presence of a racioethnically mixed research team helped neutralize some of the group-identification bias referred to above, but this also introduced the complications of increased stress and time needed to complete the research process, and raised the possibility of an impasse within the investigative team that could have caused the project to be abandoned.

In summary, research on racioethnic issues is less prevalent than would seem appropriate, partly because relatively few scholars are doing this research, and partly because those who are doing such work encounter obstacles to completing high-quality work beyond those typically faced when studying other OB topics. The following section addresses factors germane to the publication rates of completed work on racioethnic issues.

FACTORS AFFECTING PUBLICATION

My analysis of the survey data and relevant literature, suggests that the following four factors have hampered the publication of research on racioethnic issues in the management journals:

1. low submission rates,
2. reviewers' unfamiliarity with the relevant literature,
3. editors' and reviewers' insistence on comparative research designs, and
4. particularistic reactions to the topic and/or results.

Low Submission Rates

Evidence from three sources indicates that journals such as the *Academy of Management Review*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, and *Administrative Science Quarterly*, among others, receive few manuscripts addressing racioethnic issues.

The first source is an informal poll of six current and former editors of these journals recently undertaken by The Sub-Committee on Cultural Diversity Research of The Careers Division of the Academy of Management. The editors unanimously cited low submission rates as a major cause of low rates of publication for articles on racioethnicity in these outlets. This conclusion was reinforced by the second source, my survey subjects who serve on the editorial boards or ad hoc review panels of well-known management journals. These respondents commented that they rarely receive manuscripts on racioethnic issues.

The third source is the survey subjects who are authors of work on racioethnicity. Many of them stated that they do not send papers on racioethnic issues to the most widely circulated management journals. When asked why they do not, their responses reflected a high level of consensus that these journals have little genuine interest in the topic, and tend to lack reviewers who understand the topic well enough to provide fair reviews. For these reasons, many writers on racioethnicity strongly believe that papers on racioethnic effects have an unusually low probability of publication in the leading management journals compared to papers on other topics.¹

Reasons for concern about the fair treatment of racioethnic research in the manuscript review process are extensively discussed in the following three subsections. Evidence of the positive features of this process, however, should not be overlooked by writers. Based on their study of reviewer practices among reviewers of the *Academy of Management Review* and the *Academy of Management Journal*, Jauch and Wall (1989) conclude that the review process is thorough and conducted by highly committed reviewers. They also report that most reviewers feel obligated to provide specific feedback to authors on how to improve manuscripts. These findings demonstrate that

the review process has positive features that should enhance its fairness.

If writers' fears of unfair evaluation or a lack of interest in their work are largely unjustified, then a form of self-censorship is afoot that can undermine efforts to give scholarship on racioethnic issues the broadest possible exposure. Furthermore, I agree with Beyer's (1978) observation that the probability that one's article will be read and cited by other interested scientists is substantially greater when the article is published in one of the more widely circulated journals than when it is published in another outlet. Therefore, it is important for writers on racioethnic issues to submit their work to the leading publications.

Reviewers' Unfamiliarity with the Relevant Literature

Many of the writers on racioethnic issues surveyed expressed concern that work in this field is not fairly reviewed because reviewers are largely ignorant of the topic. Some have cited comments from reviewers of their work that they believe imply such a lack of knowledge. One respondent wrote:

. . . reviewers harp on a lack of prior research as a basis for contemporary theory on race, yet there is little prior research on which to build.

Another gave the following interpretation of the contrast she has experienced between reactions to her work on racioethnicity versus her work on other topics:

When I write about non-minority issues, the papers are always reviewed as extremely well done. When I write about minority issues, reviewers have rarely heard about the relevant theory and research and consequently have no idea what the manuscript is about.

In their discussion of the study of minority groups in leading journals of sociology, Lavender and Forsyth (1976) characterize the attitude of editors and reviewers of this research as one of indifference, insensitivity, insufficient

insight, and even hostility. Among their examples supporting this assessment, they cite Stein's review of Novak's (1971) book on ethnicity, in which Stein (1974, p. 96) opines that "ethnicity marks the retreat into parochial separation." Clearly, this is a gross misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the concept of ethnicity.

A similar example from the management field was provided by a respondent to my survey who submitted the following excerpt from the comments of a reviewer for one of the leading management journals:

I see no value in doing race comparisons. Why not compare long-haired people to short-haired people instead?

This comment hints at some hostility toward the topic, and certainly reflects a lack of understanding of the importance and complexity of racioethnicity as an influence on human interaction in America and its institutions. The reviewer equates the significance of differences in hair length to that of racioethnic differences. Because research has shown that, after controlling for variables such as education and social class, racioethnicity in our society affects everything from economic well-being (Morishima, 1981) to psychological well-being (Thomas & Hughes, 1986) to the availability of organ transplants (Eggers, 1988), this indeed reflects a high level of ignorance of the topic.

Although I was unable to locate any specific empirical data on the extent to which research on racioethnic issues is reviewed by people familiar with the relevant literature, empirical evidence does exist indicating that a significant proportion of reviewers for major management journals do not check other sources when reviewing a paper on an unfamiliar topic (Jauch & Wall, 1989). To the extent that reviewers for the leading journals are less familiar with research on racioethnicity than they are with other topics in the field, this may have a differ-

ential impact on the review process for manuscripts on racioethnic issues.

The Debate Over Comparative Research Designs

I found that writers on racioethnicity agree that mainstream journals have a strong bias for comparative research designs (i.e., designs that compare data for two or more racioethnic groups, especially those that call for a white "control" group). The respondents are split sharply, however, as to whether or not this bias is proper. The views of one camp are typified by the following comments from two white writers. A white man stated:

I think writers on race are obligated to compare data to the existing literature [on the majority race] or to use comparison groups.

A white woman said:

As I read the paper [on the experience of black women] I kept asking myself the question: How is this similar or different from the experience of white women in male dominated settings?

A third, somewhat different example of the position favoring comparison groups is the following quotation from a white male scholar, which comes from a discussion of this issue at a recent symposium of The Academy of Management:

We cannot learn anything about black policemen by simply studying black policemen [i.e., without comparing them to policemen of another racial group].

The opposing camp feels just as strongly that insisting on the use a comparative group in research on racioethnic issues is an unfair and unjustifiable limitation. Those taking this position point out that the requirement to use a second racioethnic group was never made when research samples were all white, even though findings for white subjects could not justifiably be assumed to apply to people of other racioethnic groups. This argument seems to be supported by the large number of published reports

of studies that fail to even mention the racioethnic composition of samples or to acknowledge that the results may not apply to all racioethnic groups. Moreover, they argue that the accumulation of knowledge on people from nonwhite racioethnic groups has merit in its own right, independent of how it compares to that for some other group.

I believe that the key to resolving this controversy lies in understanding—and accepting—alternative types of research questions for research on racioethnic issues. Consider the example referring to research on black police officers. A research question that asks how black police officers compare to white police officers with regard to variable X is quite different from one that simply asks what the characteristics of black police officers are with regard to variable X. If the population for which one wishes to make inferences is black police officers, then clearly one can gain knowledge from samples comprising only black police officers. It is only when one is interested in the broader population of police officers in general—and in the effects of racioethnic differences within that population—that a requirement of comparative designs is justified.

The core issue is therefore the legitimacy of research targeting populations that are racioethnic subgroups of organizations. I submit that such research is legitimate, and that non-comparative research designs are therefore entirely appropriate for many research questions on the effects of racioethnic diversity in organizations. Moreover, although questions related to understanding differences among racioethnic groups are central to research in this field, such comparisons need not always be made within a particular research project. For example, if I am interested in racioethnic differences among police officers as to job attitudes and can find data from studies of police officers from minority racioethnic groups, then the body of knowledge is more complete because of the presence of these studies. Such data are

useful regardless of whether the researchers compared their findings to the findings of studies of police officers from majority groups, or whether I have to make such comparisons myself.

Particularistic Reactions to the Topic and/or Results

Various scholars have discussed the prevalence of particularism in the review processes affecting social science research (Astley, 1985; Beyer, 1978; Clark, 1973; Crane, 1967; Frost & Taylor, 1985; Pfeffer, Leong, & Strehl, 1977). The term refers to high levels of subjectivity and personal bias effects in the review process because of the absence of consensus in a field as to matters such as the importance of various topics, accepted methods of investigating them, and accepted prior knowledge in the area (Beyer, 1978). Crane (1967) presents evidence that various nonscientific factors, such as an author's academic affiliation, influence the review process of scientific journals.

In more recent studies, both Beyer (1978) and Pfeffer, Leong, and Strehl (1977) found that particularism is more prevalent in the social sciences than in "hard" sciences such as chemistry. Recent research focused specifically on major management journals reinforces their conclusions. For example, Jauch and Wall (1989) reviewed research showing that inter-reviewer agreement on manuscripts is generally low, with most studies reporting correlations below .3, and that different reviewers tend to emphasize different criteria. Based on a study of 301 reviewers of 19 leading management journals, Kerr, Tolliver, and Petree (1977) concluded that although most journals offer guidelines to assist reviewers in forming consensus for evaluation, such guidelines are not as important to the ultimate decisions as are the "individual predispositions and attitudes" of reviewers (p. 140). Similarly, in their study of reviewers of the *Academy of Management*

Journal and the *Academy of Management Review*, Jauch and Wall (1989) found that reviewers frequently pay little attention to formal review criteria. Richard Daft, former editor of *Administrative Science Quarterly*, once stated flatly, "I find that reviewing is more subjective than objective" (quoted by Morgan, 1985, p. 194).

In addition to high levels of subjectivity in general, writers have particularly noted the effects of prevailing ideologies and of social similarities among authors and those reviewing their work. Frost and Taylor (1985) explain that the ideologies of journal gatekeepers (i.e., editors and reviewers) represent value systems that have an inevitable effect on the review process. They further state that such ideologies have impacts that are often not readily apparent, and that they tend to be defended by the dominant coalition which has a vested interest in their perpetuation.

Given this perspective, decisions to publish or reject manuscripts reflect editorial attention to a value system frequently taken for granted that governs the scientific research process. This value system may determine, in large measure, what is included in, or excluded from, the content of academic journals. (p. 39)

In a similar vein, Astley (1985) argues that a paper's chances of publication are improved if the author and the evaluator of the manuscript are "socially similar" and that decision makers rely on "social" standards in evaluating work.

To the extent that the topic of racioethnic effects is especially vulnerable to personal views and ideological effects, or that the value systems of authors of work on racioethnicity tend to differ from those of the dominant coalition of gatekeepers, the publication of work in this area may be unduly hampered. I believe both assertions are true. Although I am unaware of any direct empirical evidence in support of these contentions, there are some indications of their accuracy. Merton specifically cites race as one of several personal attributes of a scientist that may interfere with the "objec-

tive evaluation of his work" (1957, p. 553). Clark (1973), a black researcher and editor, has explicitly argued that gatekeepers in the field of psychology have tended to exclude writings on many subjects of particular interest to black scholars (he cites the topics of oppression and exploitation as examples). Clark further states that editors who attempt to depart from the prevailing ideology do so at the risk of endangering their survival in this role.

Alderfer and Tucker (1988) point out that in predominantly white settings, members of racial minority groups are forced to deal with race differences whereas whites often choose to overlook or deny the significance of race in their lives. Because of this difference, they argue that the simple act of asking a white person to complete a questionnaire about race issues creates discomfort and a negative response to the questionnaire.

That racioethnic topics often illicit unfavorable emotional reactions and psychological discomfort is also suggested by the experiences cited by some respondents to my survey. One reported that she was advised by a funding agency and by some prospective participants for a study of black women to take the word "race" out of the project's title because this would stifle the response rate. Another cited a recent survey he had conducted for which one-third of the respondents declined to answer questions related to ethnic background. Many of the writers expressed a belief that reactions to their work were partly influenced by adverse reactions to the topic. Typical comments were that race is "an emotionally explosive topic" and "the subject of race is taboo."

Several writers responding to my survey further commented specifically that they believed reviewers were influenced by their personal reactions to research findings. A black female respondent said:

People raise questions about the reality of the findings that refer to conditions that they want to deny. An example is racism.

A white female respondent commented:

There is an orthodoxy about what are/are not acceptable findings. . . . If one violates the party line in this regard, the article will not be published.

In addition to this evidence, it seems clear that the discussion presented above about the effects of researcher group identity on the research process also applies to reviewers' evaluation of such research. The following excerpt from a review of a manuscript addressing racioethnic issues, which was sent by a respondent to my survey, is illustrative:

Please note as you read my comments that I bring my own biases to the review as a white female. I am sure others with different group memberships would pick up on yet another set of concerns. At the same time, some of the comments I raise would probably be raised by most reviewers.

Note the implications of the "extra" concerns arising from the interaction of the reviewer's race and/or gender and the content of the work. The reviewer further notes a concern about how the data reported for black women compare to those for white women—a concern that my research indicates would probably not have been raised by a black reviewer. Hence the evaluation of the manuscript was influenced by the seemingly irrelevant factor of the racioethnic identity of the reviewer.

More evidence comes from the study cited earlier by Kerr et al. (1977), which found that two-thirds of reviewers are inclined to reject a competent manuscript if the topic is considered outside the mainstream of the field. Combining this finding with those presented in the discussion of how scholars are discouraged from basing research agenda on racioethnicity indicates that some reviewers may well react unfavorably toward racioethnicity as a research topic outside the mainstream.

Another issue related to the review process was noted by some respondents to my survey, who expressed the view that unfavorable reactions of reviewers and editors to the topic or

conclusions of racioethnic research often manifest themselves in greater scrutiny of such work and perhaps a greater propensity to reject papers on racioethnic issues. Although a majority (63%) of the respondents reported that they had not observed a difference in rates of acceptance for work on racioethnic issues versus work on other topics, ten writers reported they had observed a difference unfavorable to racioethnic work.

Several respondents also reported that they had experienced a higher level of “hassle” in getting work on racioethnic issues accepted. One pair of co-authors was encouraged to make two revisions of a paper on managers from minority groups, only to see it ultimately rejected. Although this result occurs for papers on other topics, the reasons given for rejecting manuscripts on racioethnic issues sometimes border on the bizarre—as indicated by the following three examples submitted by survey respondents. The first and third came from black female scholars, and the second from a white male scholar.

- “Although it is important to know more about black women, what about Hispanics and black men? Why not look at those groups?”
- “A sample of eight firms is not representative, I would prefer a world-wide sample.”
- The reasons given for rejection of my grant proposal were: a. “there is no evidence that blacks and whites have had different racial experiences in the U.S.” and b. “the project will not ‘solve’ racism.”

A common theme of these comments is that the implied—or even explicit—expectations of the reviewers seem unnecessary and unreasonable. A combination of the factors discussed in this article could account for the reviewers’ reactions. If reviewers are biased against the topic or conclusions, or if they have little insight into the dynamics of racioethnic

identity as a variable for research in organizational settings, they may respond by making exaggerated demands for work on racioethnicity, which they may then use as a basis for not supporting its publication.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented above leads me to conclude that, compared to most other topics related to organization management, work on racioethnicity is both more difficult to perform and more difficult to publish, at least in the leading academic journals. Much of this difficulty exists because American society has never really resolved problems of racioethnic relations and racioethnic heterogeneity, including those related to racism.

The core racioethnic issue framed in the organizational context is equal employment opportunity. Research focused directly or indirectly on this issue has “personal” implications for both authors and gatekeepers, which frequently differ according to one’s racioethnic group identification. Perhaps the most direct implications are policy changes for or against affirmative action programs. Research that promotes the conclusion that opportunity is not equal for members of different racioethnic groups may be used to bolster affirmative action efforts, whereas research finding no such differences has the opposite effect.

That members of different racioethnic groups have different perspectives on the status of equal opportunity is clearly demonstrated by survey data on the economic progress of black Americans. For example, a recent survey shows that 80% of blacks—versus only 37% of whites—think that a black applicant for a job would be less likely to be selected over a competing white if both were equally qualified, and that 70% of whites—versus only 40% of blacks—believe that blacks are paid the same as whites when they do the same jobs (Jackson & Collingwood, 1988).

This conclusion is also supported by Kluegel (1985), who reviewed data indicating that a majority of white Americans now believe that economic opportunity for black Americans is equal to or better than that of white Americans. Kluegel notes that this belief substantially reduces the impetus for cross-racial collective action to improve the economic achievement of minority groups, and specifically cites a lack of support among whites for affirmative action as an example.

The differences in these perspectives on racioethnic equality of opportunity may partly be attributable to different levels of racioethnic consciousness. Although blacks (Broman, Neighbors, & Jackson, 1988; Chang & Ritter, 1976), Asians (Bond & Yang, 1982), and Hispanics (Wong-Rieger & Quintana, 1987) generally identify strongly with their racioethnic groups, whites often have low levels of racioethnic consciousness (Alderfer, 1982; Thomas, 1990). Because whites often do not think of their own racioethnicity as salient in their lives, they may be less conscious of the effects of the racioethnic identity of others on their lives.

The arguments presented above lead me to conclude that racioethnicity is a topic for which it is especially difficult to be neutral or to achieve true objectivity. If a scholar from a minority group writes or reviews a research report implying null racioethnic effects, this scholar is likely to feel ambivalence about the findings and to be influenced by concerns about how the publication of the findings will affect her or his own racioethnic group's struggle for equal opportunity. A scholar from the majority group who writes or reviews a research report indicating differential racioethnic effects may be influenced by concerns about how the findings may be used to provoke changes in the status of the dominant cultural group in our society and/or by feelings of guilt over the exposed inequality of opportunity based on racioethnicity.

My own biases as a black African American who identifies strongly with both the black sub-cultural group and the American dominant culture are undoubtedly reflected in this article. I hope that the issues raised and examples given will stimulate discussion and debate on the circumstances surrounding the completion and publication of scholarly work on racioethnicity as a variable in organizational research. Such discussions may enable the academy of scientists interested in organizational research to identify steps to improve the rate of publication of reports of high-quality research on racioethnic issues. I conclude with my own suggestions toward that end.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Suggestions for Researchers

Whenever possible, research teams should be multi-racioethnic and should include representatives from all racioethnic groups included in the research. Cross-group research teams should improve the quality of the scientific work on the topic of racioethnicity if they are characterized by (1) high levels of group identity and consciousness and attention to the effects of group identity on the work, and by (2) a sincere respect for and appreciation of the diverse perspectives the members bring to the team.

Scholars must avoid self-censorship, and the full range of publication outlets should contain work on racioethnic issues. Therefore, the submission of work on this topic to the major journals of the management field must increase.

In addition to work on racioethnicity, we have a great need for empirical research that explicitly examines the impact of racioethnic group identity on the processes of conducting and reviewing work on racioethnic issues. Such research would have great value for increasing the level of attention paid to these issues within the scientific community, and

for showing how these effects can best be managed.

Researchers must make greater use of data collection strategies such as in-depth field interviews, qualitative-quantitative approaches such as those discussed by Schofield and Anderson (1987), questionnaires combined with telephone follow-up procedures, and the use of open-ended questions. The research conducted for this article suggests that traditional methods such as mail questionnaires with closed-ended questions and archival data may not nearly be as effective for work in this area.

For the sake of both the quality and quantity of research on racioethnic issues, the involvement of white scholars in research on this subject must not only continue, but increase.

Those in the roles of doctoral advisors and colleagues must take every opportunity to encourage scholars interested in racioethnic issues to pursue these interests. The prevalent discouragement against the study of this topic, especially of scholars belonging to minority groups, must be eradicated.

Suggestions for Editors and Reviewers

Editors should make every effort to ensure that scholars familiar with racioethnic issues and research are represented on review boards and ad hoc review panels. In addition, the selection of reviewers for papers on racioethnic issues must be based on familiarity with the literature on racioethnic issues in addition to familiarity with any other variables addressed in the paper. For example, a paper addressing communication styles among Hispanics should ideally be sent for review to at least one person who knows the literature on Hispanics in organizations, as well as to at least one reviewer with expertise in communications.

Whenever possible, the group of reviewers selected to evaluate work on racioethnic research should be multi-racioethnic. Reviewers should reflect carefully on their biases and dis-

cuss them explicitly in their feedback to authors. They should also be more diligent than is now typical—as indicated by the findings presented in this article—about seeking others' opinions whenever their own knowledge or biases about a paper's topic may interfere with their ability to review it fairly.

Definitions of acceptable research designs and data collection methods, and perhaps of "good" theory as well, have been too narrow in the review process. This article provides some examples of this narrowness. In general, when evaluating a scholarly work, editors and reviewers must pay more attention to the effects of the topic on the processes of obtaining, analyzing, and reporting data. The study of racioethnic issues has unique dimensions that must be acknowledged throughout the review process.

These suggestions are not intended to be exhaustive, and I acknowledge that it is easier to specify needed changes than to bring them about. An important means of initiating change, however, is increasing people's awareness of the issues. I hope this paper has facilitated that objective and will serve as a catalyst for discussing and changing the dynamics of research by organizational scholars on racioethnic issues.

NOTE

1. I must emphasize that although some of the writers expressing these views based them on direct experience, many had no such experience and based their responses on their impressions or on what they have heard from others. Moreover, a significant number of the survey respondents have submitted their work to the best-known journals of the field, and expressed no reservations about doing so in the future. It may be significant that the latter group of writers is disproportionately representative of those who have produced older work on racioethnicity (i.e., work done in the 1960s and 1970s), whereas a majority of the skeptical writers began producing their work in the last five to eight years. Whether this

disparity reflects differences related to the work itself or simply reflects differences in the career stages of the authors is unclear.

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