According to recent estimates from the United States Census Bureau, almost one in every three U.S. citizens is a member of a racial or ethnic minority group. Breaking the population down further, nearly 43 million Americans are Hispanic or Latino. Greater than 36 million Americans are Black, over 12 million are of Asian decent, and slightly more than 2 million are Native American or Alaskan. Collectively, minorities account for nearly 100 million Americans, a number greater than the entire populations of most of the world’s countries.

With this increasing population diversity has come increased research attention on the effects of racial and ethnic diversity in organizational settings. For instance, in an extensive study of quick-service restaurants, Sacco and Schmitt (2005) found racial diversity to exhibit a negative effect on financial performance. Other research (e.g., Richard, 2000; Richard, Barnett, Dwyer, & Chadwick, 2004), however, has shown the relationship to be more complex, with a firm’s choice of strategy moderating the effects of its diversity on performance.

Although more researchers are examining the effects of demography on organizational processes, inquiry focusing on members of underrepresented groups has not received comparable interest. This relative inattention is puzzling in light of evidence suggesting that the organizational experiences of minorities (and the interpretations thereof) differ significantly from those of their White peers (e.g., Deitch et al., 2003; Lovelace & Rosen, 1996; McKay et al., in press). Consequently, the purpose of this column is to review recent (2001–2006) I-O psychology research focusing on domestic racial and ethnic minority populations. My hope is that illustrating the relative scarcity of this type of research will spur interest in it among both authors and editors alike.

In the sections that follow, I briefly review research appearing in the top 10 I-O journals (Zickar & Highhouse, 2001) during the past 5 years by topic. To be included, an article must have been empirical. Additionally, studies must have (a) focused on investigating racial and ethnic differences using a diverse sample or (b) utilized only a single minority group as its sample. To eliminate possible redundancy, I excluded meta-analyses from consideration.
Research Review

Early Stage Career Development

The I-O research uncovered in my review spanned a number of topics. The one clearly receiving the most attention was career development, with the bulk of this research appearing in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Four studies focused on career development among Blacks. Byars-Winston (2006) found that Black undergraduates’ racial ideology played a considerable role in determining their career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, career interests, and perceived career barriers. A related study also showed math self-efficacy to be a strong predictor of Black students’ interest in math as a course of study and prospective career option (Waller, 2006). Linnehan and his colleagues (Linnehan, 2001; Linnehan, Weer, & Uhl, 2005) explored the impact of mentoring among Black high school students. They reported that mentoring bolsters academic performance and that higher ethnic identifiers place greater importance on having similar mentors.

Other recent early stage career development research has focused on Hispanics. Gushue (2006), for example, found that Latino/Latina high school students’ ethnic identity directly predicted career decision-making self-efficacy and indirectly predicted career expectations through its effect on self-efficacy. In a qualitative study on the experiences of gay and lesbian youth, Adams, Cahill, and Ackerlind (2005) found that being gay or lesbian and Hispanic led their participants to develop a unique approach to career development based on their individuality and its perceived consequences.

Recruitment, Testing, & Selection

After individuals have chosen a career course, they must obtain employment. This process often involves some combination of recruitment, testing, and personnel selection. Recent research on majority–minority differences and advertising suggests that, when primed, minorities respond more favorably to in-group spokespeople and targeted advertisements (Forehand, Deshpandé, & Reed, 2002). An important caveat to the latter conclusion, however, is that targeted ads depicting employee diversity should contain minority representation at all hierarchical levels (Avery, 2003). In addition, work by Slaughter, Bachiochi, and their colleagues (Cropanzano, Slaughter, & Bachiochi, 2005; Slaughter, Sinar, & Bachiochi, 2002) demonstrated the role of organizational justice and prior experience with discrimination in understanding Black applicants reactions to affirmative action programs. Not only is fairness important in attracting these individuals, but those that have experienced discrimination also look for specific evidence indicating that opportunity is available.

Within the testing literature, the recent investigations involving minorities have focused on between-group differences and adverse impact. Stereotype threat, or the belief that one’s group is incapable of performing comparably
to other groups on certain tasks and instruments, appears to play a role in these differences (Brown & Day, 2006; Roberson, Dietch, Brief, & Block, 2003). For instance, Black–White differences on the Raven’s Advanced Progressive Matrices failed to reach conventional levels of statistical significance only when perceived threat was low. Other testing research indicated that Black–White testing differences tend to be greater on more cognitively loaded competencies (Goldstein, Yusko, & Nicolopoulos, 2001) and multiple-choice as opposed to write-in response formats (Arthur, Edwards, & Barnett, 2002), and may be less influenced by differential dropout rates than previously believed (Tam, Murphy, & Lyall, 2004).

Two recent race-related studies on selection have extended our knowledge of this process for Black applicants. McFarland, Ryan, Sacco, and Kriska (2004) found that Black interview raters engage in greater in-group bias than White applicants when they are in predominantly Black rating panels. In a very different type of selection study, Fields, Goodman, and Blum (2005) observed that organizations experiencing greater difficulty in human resource recruitment and retention, which they labeled human resource dependency, are more likely to hire Black applicants than those with less dependency.

**Workplace Relations**

Within the workplace, employees often must work cooperatively with one another to accomplish organizational tasks. Bacharach, Bamberger, and Vashdi (2005) examined how racial composition and peer support climate affect the relationships between Black and White work peers. They found that Black–White relationship quality varies according to both composition and climate in a complex interactive manner. In the only study I found focusing on Native Americans, Clark (2002) observed that certain work factors led employees to develop a sense of control and community at work that, in turn, promoted conflict between participants’ work and family roles.

Although it is nice when workplace relations are harmonious, this is often not the case. Moreover, disharmonious organizational experiences tend to be more prevalent among minorities. In fact, Fox and Stallworth (2005) reported that Black, Hispanic, and Asian-American workers in their study reported experiencing significantly more racial/ethnic bullying (i.e., ill treatment and hostile behavior related to one’s racial/ethnic group membership) than their White counterparts. Although they also reported differences in response patterns to this harassment, recent research on sexual harassment suggests that minority and White women tend to respond to it similarly (Cortina & Wasti, 2005).

**Performance and Promotion**

In a smoothly functioning organization, employees are judged on their performance and ability to perform, with the deserving receiving promotions increasing their pay, prestige, and responsibility. Unfortunately, recent evidence
suggests that this is not the case in many organizations. For instance, Powell and Butterfield (2002) found that review panels for top management positions in the federal government tended to discriminate against Black and Hispanic applicants. Foley, Kidder, and Powell (2002) showed that Hispanic law associates perceived greater opportunity for success and advancement in firms containing more Hispanics, suggesting that there may be power in numbers for minorities.

My review located two recent studies concerning performance. The first investigated Thomas and Ely’s (1996) access-and-legitimacy paradigm, which proposed that companies increase minority representation to gain access to, and legitimacy with, minority consumer bases. In that study, Leonard, Levine, and Joshi (2004) found that having more Asian retail associates significantly increased sales in communities containing higher proportions of residents that don’t speak English. It should be noted, however, that this effect was amidst a number of other nonsignificant effects that failed to support the access-and-legitimacy paradigm. The second study focused on cultural differences in attributions for a specific type of performance—organizational accidents. Those authors (Zemba, Young, & Morris, 2006) found that Asian Americans were more likely than White participants to assign blame to the collective, as opposed to the individual directly.

Conclusions

Despite the interesting and informative studies reviewed here, it is clear that there are many opportunities for research on underrepresented racial and ethnic minority populations in the United States. Over the past 5 years, only 25 studies of this type have appeared in the premier I-O journals, which is less than one article per journal per year. This suggests that minorities have become slightly more visible than in the period preceding Cox and Nkomo’s (1990) more exhaustive review. I freely admit that I, inadvertently, may have overlooked some studies and that my inclusion criteria probably omitted others indirectly addressing minority issues. Furthermore, there is certainly relevant research that has appeared in reputable outlets not included in Zickar and Highhouse’s top 10. Nonetheless, I believe it is critical that more research on underrepresented minorities appear in journals with the largest impact on our field.

References


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