

On February 22, 2021, the Academy of Management OB Division organized a session on racial biases and systemic racism in our research process with a panel consisting of Derek Avery, Tracy Dumas, Aparna Joshi, and Mo Wang:

#BlackLivesMatter in the Academy: An Anti-bias Lens on OB Research

As part of the session, participants contributed thoughts on the key problems to address and how to address them through a Qualtrics link. The following is an integrative summary of the $N = 70$ (out of $N = 90$ in the interactive part of the session) responses received.

We asked people to capture the problem they sought to address and ways they identified to address the problem. It is possible to identify a couple of main themes in these contributions, but it should be noted that these are intertwined and calling them themes makes them sound more categorical than they really are.

The key *problem* highlighted is a bias against race and diversity research and, intertwined with this, against people of color interested in studying issues of race and diversity. The bias expresses itself in lack of openness to race and diversity as topics worth studying, lack of openness to the sample/methodological implications of studying race and diversity (e.g., a relatively low number of respondents with a minority background in the sample would follow from the very meaning of the word minority but is often criticized as a research shortcoming), and lack of openness to the diversity in what diversity means in different countries (e.g., diversity in the European context and diversity in the North American context manifest themselves differently). Respondents observe that there is an implicit White Northern America-centric norm in the publication process that results in questioning the value (conceptually and methodologically) of studying research questions that concern populations/samples that are not predominantly White Northern American. Directly related to this is that research on race and diversity is not encouraged, and often actively discouraged, for PhD students and (junior) faculty as not interesting enough, too controversial, and as a result too difficult to publish in. Part of the diagnosis advanced here points to some potential solutions: management as a research field is perceived to be (Northern American) White (male) dominated and this is reflected in editor teams, editorial boards, and the reviewer pool (i.e., the issue here is perceived to be not just the overall numbers but also representation in positions of influence).

As with the problems, the main themes in the *solutions* advanced are closely intertwined. These are not limited to what journals can do, but an important theme is what respondents say on this count. Recognizing that biases and research on race and diversity likely originate in an implicit “White Northern American” norm for what are good research questions and research samples and that people have been socialized into this norm throughout their career, respondents advocate actions to increase awareness of these biases through editor and reviewer education and training. At the same time, respondents recognize that increasing awareness in and of itself is insufficient to effectively address biases, and advocate actions journals can take in addition to raising awareness:

- (i) Increase diversity – racial as well as regional – among editors, boards, and ad hoc reviewers, and assign papers on race and diversity in particular to diverse review teams (e.g., don't have an all-White review team for a paper on race; don't have an all-Northern American review team for a paper from outside of Northern America).
- (ii) Train researchers, editors, and reviewers to recognize and address racial biases in the research process.
- (iii) Gather data on the occurrence of such biases in the review process. Systematically analyze the potential occurrence of biases in the treatment of manuscripts as a function of research question (e.g., how does the acceptance rate of race and diversity submissions compare to other submissions?), research samples, and author demographics as evidenced in rejection rates and number of revision required for publication. Publicize the results of such analyses.
- (iv) Systematically monitor expressions of biases in reviews and decision letters, (e.g., is the issue of generalizability raised more often for samples that are not predominantly White Northern American?).
- (v) Create the opportunity for authors, reviewers, and editors to report such biases
- (vi) Request that authors for all studies report sample composition data in terms of race, gender, and region of origin (i.e., for many studies, this would presumably clarify that they are predominantly White – note that this comes with the caveat that for many European countries there are major hurdles to getting data on race and ethnicity).
- (vii) Actively encourage race and diversity research through special issues.

Contributions also recognize that while what happens as journals is key, we also need to focus on the “supply chain”. When editors and reviewers at our top journals are predominantly White Northern American we also need to recognize that they are drawn from a pool of potential editors and reviewers in which White Northern Americans are strongly represented. Thus, more actively recruiting and promoting with an eye on diversity within our science at large would also help create greater diversity at journals. In a related vein, respondents recognize that awareness of biases in the review process and how to avoid them can also be developed outside of the journals (e.g., workshops, sessions like this, PhD training, PDWs at AOM). Likewise, race and diversity research can be encouraged through training, workshops, PDWs, etc. There would thus also be a clear role for faculty and PhD hiring, PhD programs, AOM, etc. These efforts would also include calling out expressions of racial biases such as recently observed in the job market spread sheet used within our community.

March 1, 2021

AOM OB Division session organizers: Darren Bharanitharan, Elizabeth George, Denise Lewin Loyd, Daan van Knippenberg, and Howie Xu