

BRIEF REPORT

The Incidence of Photographs of Racial Minorities in Introductory Psychology Texts

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The purpose of this report was to examine the frequency of photographs of racial minorities in 1985-1986 introductory psychology texts. Results showed that Whites were overrepresented in the texts and that racial minorities were underrepresented, even when crosscultural photographs were included. The results of this report suggested that many texts do not reflect, as one might expect, the racial diversity of the United States.

Pictures in introductory psychology texts illustrate concepts and add visual appeal to the written information. In addition, photographs in texts are often remembered by students, and consequently, may have great educational potential (Goldstein, Bailis, & Chance 1983). Because text photographs convey information *about* a culturally diverse population *to* a culturally diverse population, one might assume that the diversity in the photographs would match the diversity in the population. But psychological sources have been found lacking when it comes to information regarding racial minorities (e.g., Brown, Goodwin, Hall, & Jackson-Lowman, 1985; McLoyd & Randolph, 1985), suggesting that minorities may be underrepresented in photographs in texts as well.

Portions of this paper were presented at a poster session at the Ninth Annual Institute on the Teaching of Psychology, January 1987 in Clearwater Beach, FL.

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To test the hypothesis that minorities are not adequately represented, eighteen 1985–1986 introductory psychology texts, sent to the Psychology Department at Chestnut Hill College for possible consideration for the school year beginning September 1986, were examined. These texts represented slightly more than half of the texts available for the school year 1986–1987, according to the *Subject Guide to Books in Print, 1987–1988*. Photographs were inspected for the appearance of racial minorities — minorities as listed by the U.S. Census Bureau (1985). The number of members of racial groups and the position of members of racial groups in the photographs (foreground or background) were irrelevant in this survey. Photographs of art work and photographs of nonhumans were not counted. Photographs that were cross-cultural (such as, African bushpersons or Trobriand Islanders) were noted.

Results and Discussion

Z tests for the significance of a difference between two proportions (i.e., that obtained and that expected from Census figures), suggested that minorities were significantly underrepresented in the texts and that Whites were significantly overrepresented ($p < .001$ in both cases). In particular, 14.7% of the photographs represented racial minorities and 92.3% of the photographs included Whites (the percentages add to 107% because some photographs were multiracial and therefore were counted for Whites and racial minorities). African Americans were the most frequently represented minority group but were still underrepresented according to Census Bureau data. Minority representation in the texts varied from 6.7% to 41.9%. When Whites appeared in photographs (i.e., 92.3% of the photographs), they were the only racial group in 92.4% of those photographs. By contrast, when other racial groups appeared in photographs (i.e., 14.7% of the photographs), they were the only racial group in 51.1% of those photographs. When photographs had mixed racial groups, Whites appeared in 97.6% of those photographs.

Some of the photographs of minorities were crosscultural and did not represent racial minorities in the United States. When crosscultural photographs were eliminated from consideration, racial minorities were represented in only 12.1% of the photographs, with a range in the texts from 6.1% to 27.9%. Minorities were in 40% of the single racial group photographs. In conclusion, the data from the survey revealed that the photographs most likely to be found in the texts were ones with Whites alone.

It is possible that the photographs in the texts reflected the degree of participation of minorities in the research. If racial minorities were not participants in the studies cited in the texts, perhaps the concepts developed from such studies did not apply to minorities. However, there were no

statements in the prefaces of the texts that cautioned the reader that the research discussed was limited to a particular racial group, nor were there suggestions in the texts that the photographs reflected the subject pools of the studies cited.

If the photographs were meant to reflect broad applicability of the concepts in the texts, the photographs should have been more in line with the diversity of the population of the United States. If, on the other hand, information about racial minorities was not included in the texts, the limitations of the information should have been made clear to the reader.

Future authors of psychology texts should broaden the scope of the texts by including information about racial minorities and reports of research about and by racial minorities.

References

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