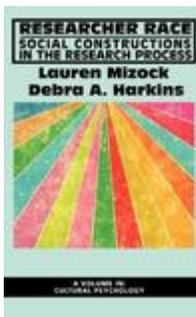


Reflections on Race and Research

A review of



Researcher Race: Social Constructions in the Research Process

by Lauren Mizock and Debra A. Harkins

Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012. 93 pp. ISBN 978-1-61735-699-5 (hardcover); ISBN 978-1-61735-698-8 (paperback). \$85.99, hardcover; \$45.99, paperback

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Race is a socially constructed concept that is typically viewed as having psychological relevance and implications primarily for minority group members (Helms, 1992). Because race is a socially constructed concept, its criteria are arbitrary, vary across time, and, being determined by the more powerful group(s) of society, are often used to justify oppression and exploitation of the less powerful (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). For these reasons, race affects interactions among and between all individuals and groups in society.

The research enterprise is one of the situations in which the impact of interracial interactions may have important implications. The ways in which research has been used to support racism and in which racism has been displayed in research have become the subject of review and discussion (Guthrie, 2004; Thomas & Sillen, 1972; Tucker, 2007; Washington, 2009) that have the intent of improving the research enterprise.

In *Researcher Race: Social Constructions in the Research Process*, Lauren Mizock and Debra A. Harkins attempt to add to knowledge of how race affects research by exploring the impact of researcher race on participant response in same and interracial dyads. Mizock and Harkins (White researchers) include an African American researcher, Renee Morant, as a chapter author on three chapters, which is important, given the book's subject matter and the position that the authors take on the presence of ethnic minority voice in the research enterprise. This short text is a volume in a series called Cultural Psychology that has covered topics as diverse as the role of culture in self, human development, and cognition.

The book provides a very brief overview of and reflects on the impact of three key issues related to race as it affects research. *Researcher Race* is organized into seven chapters, divided into two parts. Part I begins with an overview of the history of racism and discrimination in research, moves to a discussion of culturally competent research methodology, and then discusses narrative method and the methodology used in the study presented. The findings and research implications of the study are presented in the second half of the book, Chapters 4–7. There is an appendix that provides resources to support culturally competent research methods.

The introductory chapters are brief and can be considered to be only cursory reviews of the subject matter. The heart of the book is the findings presented in Part II. The findings are based on interviews with 20 Black and 20 White participants, who were organized into 10 Black/Black, 10 Black/White, 10 White/White, and 10 White/Black researcher–participant dyads. The participants were asked to reflect on issues of culture and race and to comment on the experience of engaging in a discussion of these issues with the researchers.

Mizock and Harkins acknowledge the limitations of the sampling and thus the findings. All participants were university students and may have responded differently than might a sample with greater diversity in education and income. There were male and female participants, but the researchers were women, and therefore it is possible that gender affected some of the responses and reactions to the interview questions analyzed. In addition, male researchers might have interpreted the reactions and responses quite differently than did the female researchers conducting the study.

Indeed, I found that my reactions to the narrative responses provided by the participants sometimes differed from the interpretations and insights offered by the authors. However, this is the strength of the book: Readers will be able to reflect on the material, generate their own questions about race and research, consider the role of researcher race, and, most important, consider how their own race and racial attitudes might affect their work.

Some more clinically oriented researchers might take issue with the queries used to generate the narratives under scrutiny. I frequently found myself thinking about what I perceived as less leading and more neutral probes, but in some instances I felt that probes should have been less assuring, creating greater tension to force more substantive reflection

by participants. Readers might ask to what extent participants' responses were the result of researcher style versus researcher race. For these reasons, it would have been helpful if the authors had provided more and longer segments of interviewee narratives for review.

Although *Researcher Race* is an easy-to-read, quick, and well-organized overview of racial issues in research, it is probably not for seasoned researchers who work in the areas of critical race theory, racial identity, or cultural competence. It is most appropriate for undergraduates or graduate students with minimal exposure to issues of culture and race in psychology or the social sciences. The book provides a number of resources and references that will assist anyone with an initial interest in this area of research, but the research studies cited should not be viewed as exhaustive. The cost of the book might lead readers to consider some of the more substantive texts available and cited in this review.

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