

Studying Underrepresented Groups

February 28, 2018

Across disciplines, there has been renewed attention to the experiences of stigmatized group members within social, educational, healthcare, and law enforcement contexts. Basic and applied research in psychological science can increase the quality of intergroup relations and improve the experiences of underrepresented group members. Specifically, research on both majority and underrepresented groups benefits psychological science by fully illuminating the interpersonal dynamics that shape these interactions (see Shelton, 2000). Full understanding of the antecedents, mechanisms, and consequences of these processes can facilitate interventions that improve the experiences of majority and minority group members (e.g., Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Despite the benefits of studying underrepresented groups, several factors can deter graduate students from pursuing this line of study. In this article, I first outline barriers that can present obstacles to research on underrepresented groups. Then I offer practical suggestions for planning research design, obtaining resources, and accessing participant populations that can accelerate the rate of data collection for graduate students conducting research with underrepresented groups.

Barriers to Productivity

The primary consideration in conducting research on underrepresented groups is that their members are, unsurprisingly, numerically underrepresented. As a result, researchers who sample minority group members collect data at a slower rate and require greater resources than those who poll majority group members.

These considerations are compounded by recent debates surrounding best research practices in psychological science. For example, several special issues of leading journals call for increased sample sizes (Asendorpf et al., 2013; Lakens & Evers, 2014). While increased sample sizes lead to more accurate estimates of effect sizes and increase statistical power, these recommendations present a particularly burdensome responsibility on researchers wishing to study underrepresented groups (see Funder et al., 2014), particularly in the use of time-intensive methods (e.g., longitudinal design, dyadic interaction).

These concerns are further complicated when considering the incentive structure of the academic job market. Today's academic jobs require CV's with more publications, collaborations, and ongoing research projects than those before. Likewise, reviewers and editors have raised their expectations for the number and quality of studies required to document and explain an effect (Maner, 2014). Taken together, these trends incentivize graduate students to conduct research using quick, resource-efficient methods — a strategy that is less amenable for researchers wishing to study underrepresented groups.

In response to these logistical challenges, graduate students can implement several steps to increase the rate of data collection for research examining minority populations.

Practical Suggestions

Optimize your research design and methods. Though the method should ultimately follow from the theory and research question, several design factors can accelerate the rate of data collection. For example, employing a within-subject or repeated-measures design can decrease the number of participants needed to complete a particular study. Likewise, research paradigms that allow investigators to run multiple subjects simultaneously, such as computer-based tasks instead of single-participant sessions, will enhance the rate of data collection. Beyond design, how researchers structure and manage a study can affect this factor as well. For example, weighted incentives can discourage attrition in longitudinal studies by structuring compensation in a way that encourages full participation (e.g., \$5 for Time 1, \$5 for Time 2, and \$20 for Time 3). Furthermore, sending email or text reminders 24 hours before study sessions can significantly reduce the no-show rate, allowing researchers to maximize their resources.

Recruit paid participants. Since the subject pool of typical universities does not usually boast significant numbers of diverse or underrepresented populations, expanding participant recruitment beyond a departmental group can increase the rate of data collection. However, one barrier for graduate students is the ability to compensate paid participants. A natural first step is to ask your advisor for research funds. Additionally, several other resources can provide graduate students with funds to compensate participants. For example, universities often have area, departmental, or college-wide grants available exclusively for graduate students. Many universities also have unique funding available for undergraduate students wishing to conduct research. Collaborating with an undergraduate student not only provides valuable mentoring experience, it also increases graduate students' access to research funds that wouldn't otherwise be available.

In addition to internal funding sources, several professional organizations offer seed money for graduate students. For example, the American Psychological Association has 86 grant opportunities available to predoctoral candidates (American Psychological Association, 2017). Other funding sources include the Association for Psychological Science, the American Psychological Foundation, and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, all of which provide small grant opportunities that can be used to compensate paid participants.

Modify method of study administration. Beyond research design and having the necessary resources, graduate students can still encounter difficulties accessing sufficient numbers of potential research subjects. One potential solution is to administer the study online. If the theory and research question can be tested in an online setting, Amazon's MTurk online survey platform and Qualtrics Research Panels offer access to thousands of underrepresented group members. While MTurk does not allow you to post studies for a certain demographic, a screening survey can be set up to identify eligible participants based on almost any criterion. Furthermore, both TurkPrime and Qualtrics Panels allow researchers to select certain demographic characteristics of potential subjects for an additional fee.

Apart from the online format, expanding recruitment beyond your psychology departmental subject pool can increase access to underrepresented groups. Researchers can send inquiry emails or Facebook messages to student organizations or fraternities and sororities that cater to the particular characteristics of their research subjects. Additionally, graduate students can form relationships with institutional stakeholders that cater to the desired population. For example, setting up a meeting with a representative

of the university's office of diversity or with an administrator in a particular department can increase access to minority groups. Forming connections with these institutional stakeholders can expand recruitment channels by connecting you with faculty, staff, and academic advisors who serve specific subsets of the population.

Beyond local partnerships, liaising with collaborators at other universities can be an effective way to get in touch with underrepresented groups. Some institutions cater exclusively to certain demographics (e.g., single-sex colleges, historically Black colleges and universities) that can increase access to specific participant populations. Additionally, certain schools can have an overrepresentation of some demographics based on the school's geography or culture. Forging relationships with such institutions at conferences can accelerate research projects and offer chances to form connections with external collaborators. Lastly, community samples can provide greater access to underrepresented or diverse populations. Urban locations, such as train stations, airports, medical clinics, or governmental agencies feature diverse populations who usually are waiting in line and may be willing to participate in quick surveys. æ

References

American Psychological Association (2017). Grants, awards, and funding. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/awards/>

Asendorpf, J. B., Conner, M., De Fruyt, F., De Houwer, J., Denissen, J. J., Fiedler, K., ... Wicherts, J. M. (2013). Recommendations for increasing replicability in psychology. *European Journal of Personality*, 27, 108–119. doi:10.1002/per.1919

Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. T. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 1267–1278. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003

Funder, D. C., Levine, J. M., Mackie, D. M., Morf, C. C., Sansone, C., Vazire, S., & West, S. G. (2014). Improving the dependability of research in personality and social psychology: Recommendations for research and educational practice. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18, 3–12. doi:10.1177/1088868313507536

Lakens, D., & Evers, E. R. (2014). Sailing from the seas of chaos into the corridor of stability: Practical recommendations to increase the informational value of studies. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 9, 278–292. doi:10.1177/1745691614528520

Maner, J. K. (2014). Let's put our money where our mouth is: If authors are to change their ways, reviewers (and editors) must change with them. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 9, 343–351. doi:10.1177/1745691614528215

Shelton, J. N. (2000). A reconceptualization of how we study issues of racial prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4, 374–390. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0404_6

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and

Health Outcomes of Minority Students. *Science*, 331(6023), 1447-1451. doi:10.1126/science.1198364