

RACE AND GENDER IN GROUP RESEARCH

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One of the primary issues confronting American society in the 1990's is that of diversity. If groups are indeed a microcosm of the larger society (Yalom, 1985), then groups are a perfect place for the exploration of attitudes and perceptions of racial and gender issues. Moreover, because group-as-a-whole theory (Wells, 1992) suggests that the group as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, race and gender issues can be investigated in groups with a wider lens than just that of the individual. Race and gender are quite relevant in groups because of their representation of power and class hierarchies in society. These variables represent differences between group members that often carry negative evaluations and stimulate feelings about inclusion and exclusion (Ainlay & Crosby, 1986). Given that inclusion/exclusion is one of the issues that all groups struggle with, any kind of difference, albeit visible or invisible, will serve as a catalyst for these membership issues to emerge.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First we examine how race and gender are studied in group research. Second, we discuss whether group studies examine individuals within the group, interpersonal processes between group members, or the group as a whole. This critique is in accordance with a review of group research done by Bednar and Kaul (1994) who state that a problem with group research is that it uses individual theory to explicate group phenomena. The use of individual theory does not provide an understanding of interactions between members from different racial and gender groups, nor does it further our understanding of groups as groups.

The Impact of Race and Gender in Groups

Racial and gender issues have been cited as important variables of consideration in recent years (Graham, 1992; Nelson, 1993; Sampson, 1993; Scarr, 1988). Brown and Mistry (1994) report that the group literature offers little about the interaction of race and gender and that ranking oppressions in order of "hierarchical importance is itself an oppressive act" (p.6). With this in mind, we consider these variables and issues as parallel processes that also are situational; that is, race and gender interact together to influence group dynamics while at the same time, group dynamics influence attitudes about race and gender. This is not only the case for African American or people of

color, as is often thought, but for those of European descent (or Whites) as well.

Stereotyped assumptions about differences also influence a group member's perception of self and others. Members who belong to the dominant racial, ethnic, or gender group may perceive themselves as powerful and privileged. Members who belong to the non-dominant group may perceive themselves as powerless or powerful given the context of the group. The ways in which members from different groups interact is proclaimed by some to be directly related to issues of power and authority relations (Bennis & Shepherd, 1974; Bion, 1959). The intersection of race and gender and power, authority, and interpersonal relations seem central to any discussion of group processes (McRae, 1994; Nounair, Fenichel, & Fleming, 1992). Race and gender are obvious characteristics that may influence how people perceive and relate to one another; thus, they are phenomena that cannot to be separated from group life. For these reasons, groups serve as fertile territory for studying these issues.

While many studies report the gender and race of participants as demographic variables, few consider them as comparison variables. In a review of the sex bias literature Gannon, Luchetta, Rhodes, Pardi, and Segrist, (1992) found that while the sex of participants were almost always reported, the percentage of studies examining sex differences were low and varied minimally over a 20 year period (1970-1990). Unfortunately, when one turns to the group research literature on race, the focus is on dichotomous descriptions and polarized relationships among members of different racial groups (Brayboy, 1971; Brower, Garvin, Hobson, Reed, & Reed, 1987; Patterson & Smits, 1974). In this literature Black members are often described as being angry and hostile and White members as defensive and guilty (Burke, 1984).

In the first review of race in the group literature, Davis and Proctor (1989) report that racial composition of the group is salient for both Black and White clients in that they prefer same-race groups. While Black people prefer groups that have at least equal numbers of racial representation, Whites prefer to be in the majority. They also report on one study that indicated that Black clients were reluctant to start an all-Black group in a predominantly White setting. Their review indicates that attitudinal and situational variables may influence the perceptions and behaviors of group members. Their work should caution others about making the assumptions that all people of the same racial group think and behave similarly. Ponterotto (1988) has suggested that there is a lack of recognition of the heterogeneity within racial and ethnic groups and therefore a neglect of within group differences in the multicultural literature. A group that is homogenous by skin color does not mean that members are homogenous in their attitudes and ideologies. It is important, therefore, that race (and perhaps gender) are treated as psychological rather than just demographic variables. Moreover, it is essential that Whites are included in discussions on race and that we not

assume that Whites, typically thought of as raceless, all share similar views or are a homogenous group.

Thus, we propose that race, and perhaps gender, is a more complex variable that needs to be understood in the context of racial (and gender) identity attitudes which relate to an individual's perception of a shared or common heritage with a particular racial group (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1990; Thomas, 1970). These attitudes reflect an individual's intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning as psychological implications of membership to a particular racial group (Helms, 1990). An individual's acceptance of their own racial group and of other racial groups is a reflection of ideological beliefs that influence their thinking and behavior in various situations. These attitudes can be thought of as different ego states that mature within the individual over time, as they develop a more accepting attitude about their own racial group (J. E. Helms, personal communication, June 4, 1992).

The study by McRae (1994) is an example of linking research on racial identity attitudes of individuals and the influence of these attitudes on group processes and the ways in which group processes influence individual attitudes. While individuals bring their racial (and gender) identity attitudes with them to any group they join, identity attitudes are influenced by context. Thus, it is necessary to examine the confluence of racial identity and group process. McRae's study provides the connective tissues between anecdotal accounts of race and gender issues in groups and more rigorous research studies of race and gender in groups. With this beginning, researchers can systematically examine the complex interplay of race and gender and group dynamics.

Methodological Issues

Articles in journals providing anecdotal accounts of group phenomena tend to use interpersonal and group level observations while those that use empirically based research designs often use individual measures and focus on individuals within the groups rather than on interpersonal or group level measures. In their review of group research, Bednar and Kaul (1994) point to some of the hidden problems in group research. One problem is that of theoretical relevance of studies that theorize about group phenomena with concepts from individual theory. They suggest that group research based on individual theory may have devastating consequences such as (a) not clarifying the unique dimensions of group level treatment, (b) limiting group dynamics and treatment to more individualized intrapsychic processes and (c) use of analysis and observations that are not derived from interactions in the group. The other problem that they identify in group research is the emphasis on experimental designs and suggest a shift "from experimentation to description, classification, and development of measurement techniques" (p. 640) for the relatively new science of

group research which is developmentally in its infancy stage. Their suggestions are supported by others (Burlingame, Kircher, & Taylor, 1994; Hoshmand, 1989), who recommend more process oriented studies and a broadening of the methodological stance.

Thus we are left with the following question: Is it the composition of the group, group identities of members and leaders, particular group processes, phases of group development, group leadership, or some combination of all of these factors that contribute to understanding the complex interplay between race and gender and group processes? It seems that in order to advance our understanding of groups, research methods must incorporate measures and designs that attend to the group, rather than only to the individual, as the unit of analysis. While there is much value in conducting anecdotal studies which allow the therapist or author to fully describe what went on during a group experience, it is also important to develop methods of research that provide a more consistent and systematic procedure for studying group processes. The systematic analysis of the Thomas-Hill event as an interaction of race and gender dynamics and group processes in the American society conducted by Noumair, et. al., (1992) is an example of using group-as-a-whole theory (Wells, 1992); while this inquiry is considered an application of theory, it is a step toward widening our lens to understand groups beyond the perspective of individuals alone.

Summary

In this article we have identified two important issues in group research. We propose that group research is an ideal place to study the confluence of race and gender not only as demographic but as psychological variables that are brought to the group by each individual and then influence interactions between members and the group as a whole. The research in multicultural counseling strongly indicates that these variables influence interactions between individuals as well as perceptions of self and others (Parham & Helms, 1985; Ponterotto, 1988; Sue & Sue, 1990). We suggest that racial identity attitude theory provides an avenue to study the heterogeneity and homogeneity that exists within each racial group and perhaps between racial groups in terms of racial ideology. Researchers need to broaden their lens to explore race and gender as a more complex variables that influence the behaviors of both Black and White group members in given situations and not necessarily in the same way for members of each racial group.

We also suggest that researchers conduct more studies that are theoretically relevant to group phenomena. This means attending to the interactions that occur between members, and between members and leaders, and among the group as a whole. If interactive factors are examined, group designs would move from a focus on indi-

viduals-within-groups to a more group oriented focus and thus further our understanding of groups rather than individuals in groups only. Given that research on groups with attention to gender, race, and ethnicity is in its infancy, qualitative methods that allow for inductive, descriptive, and hypothesis-generating and new quantitative methods that increase our understanding are warranted. We encourage scholars interested in this area to explore alternate research paradigms (Hoshmand, 1989) that may be more sensitive to the complexities involved in studying groups and the influence of member's racial and gender identifications on the group process. Moreover, group level phenomena can affect intrapersonal and interpersonal processes among individuals of various reference groups. Research on groups can be enhanced and revitalized with an openness to diversity, a focus on the group rather than individuals in the group, and alternative research paradigms.

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