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November 2002

## MINOR CONCERNS?: An Exploration of the Objectives and Issues of Minority Research

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Iyer, Srividya; Goodvin, Rebecca; Hayes, Sarah; and Zolnikov, Bryan, "MINOR CONCERNS?: An Exploration of the Objectives and Issues of Minority Research" (2002). *Seventh Annual National Conference, POCPWI*. 2.

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## **MINOR CONCERNS?: An Exploration of the Objectives and Issues of Minority Research**

### **Abstract**

*This session seeks to engender discussion regarding goals of minority research, the identity of individuals conducting minority research, and implications of this research for social sciences and mainstream society. The panel discussion will highlight both positive and negative sequelae of the current goals and practices of minority research.*

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Social scientists in general, and psychologists in particular, seek to understand people through research. Minority research has increased greatly in recent years, reflecting a burgeoning interest in this area. Furthering this work is essential to expanding an accurate understanding of minority experiences, and using this understanding to engender positive changes in society. However, many questions remain surrounding the motivations and implications of minority research. This panel will begin to address some of these issues by promoting discussion around three main questions:

- 1) What are the goals of minority research?
- 2) Who is engaged in minority research?
- 3) What are the implications of current goals and practices of minority research?

Understanding the objectives of minority research is essential to discerning the themes underlying this line of work. For example, why do individuals become interested in minority research? Is minority research based on an agenda? If so, is this agenda dictated by the individual researcher, or by the social sciences at large? What topics do investigators address in minority research? Are there biases or assumptions that drive this research? The goals of minority research are reflected not only in the reasons why individuals conduct this research, but also in the way that this research is carried out and reported. For example, do funding opportunities or policy initiatives influence the goals of minority research? What are the goals of having separate avenues for disseminating this research?

It is likely that attempting to address these questions without examining who is conducting minority research will lead to an incomplete understanding of the goals

behind such endeavors. Pertinent questions include what assumptions are made about those who engage in minority research? For example, is it assumed in the social sciences that minority investigators will be inclined to conduct research related to "minority issues?" Is a reverse assumption made that members of majority groups will not be interested in pursuing minority research? Are these assumptions valid? What variables underlie the decision to, or the decision not to engage in minority research? Are these variables unique depending on the group membership of the individual? Do regional or institutional factors influence this decision?

Understanding the answers to these questions will allow examination of the implications of current goals and practices in minority research. While there has been little empirical investigation of these concerns, there are a variety of possible consequences of the current status of minority research. For example, effects of current underlying assumptions and biases, as well as the specific topics addressed in minority research, will likely drive theory and research for future investigators. More concrete effects of who is conducting minority research include hiring of researchers and graduate school acceptance practices, as well as effects on career path decisions for future researchers. Both minority and majority group individuals may consider such issues as stigmatization and forced restriction of focus to a specific area of research as possible consequences of the decision to engage in minority research.

In addition to these more apparent effects of current practice in minority research, a larger issue is the perpetuation of separation of "minority group issues" from the majority culture. Despite diversity plan goals adopted by most universities that aim to "support programs that explore the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of various cultures, groups, and individuals," (Diversity Plan, University of Nebraska-Lincoln) the unintended impact of who is expected to conduct minority research may be the continued marginalization of minority group experiences. One essential question to consider is whether a majority of the onus for conducting minority research is perceived to lie with minority group members. Further questions include whether these expectations have different impacts on members of different minority groups, and how we view individuals who choose or do not choose careers in minority research.

Consideration of these issues, and many others, may raise more questions than it will answer. However, in the face of increasing dialogue about current practices and outcomes in minority research, overarching questions regarding the goals, the identity of investigators, and the implications of this research merit attention. Comprised of individuals who are diverse in both background and research interests, this panel will begin to address these broader questions. It is the panel's position that there are no "minority issues," but that questions confronting one group of people impact the whole of society, and thus are the responsibility of all people to consider. Thus, the ultimate intention of this panel will be to engender discussion regarding how best to foster positive effects of minority research, while eliminating the negative sequelae of marginalization of minority experiences from mainstream consciousness.

## **References**

Comprehensive Diversity Plan for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, June 23 1999.

## **Presenters**

**Srividya Iyer** is a graduate student in clinical psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She earned her M.A. in clinical psychology in India. Her research interests include severe mental illness, the influence of race and other such factors on medical decision-making and cross-cultural psychology.

**Rebecca Goodvin** is a graduate student in developmental psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research interests include parent-child-attachment and communication, gender and cultural factors influencing children's self-concept development, and the causes and consequences of child abuse and neglect.

**Sarah Hayes** received her B.A. from Dartmouth College with a major in psychology and a minor in women's studies. She is currently a graduate student in psychology at the University of Nebraska where her research focuses on the treatment of anxiety with an interest in minority research.

**Bryan J. Zolnikov** is a Ph.D. candidate in clinical psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He earned his B.A. in psychology at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Mr. Zolnikov is interested in structural explanations of poverty, classist discrimination, the effects of ignoring ethnicity and socioeconomic status in clinical research and neurocognition in depression.