

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Diversifying Curricula: How are Racial Minorities Represented in Lecture Slides?

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Research Domain: Higher education policy (HEP)

Abstract: Calls to diversify HE curricula have gained traction as one way in which universities can rebuild in transformative times. This study explored how members of Black or Asian versus white communities were portrayed in photographs used in lecture slides in four first year core social sciences modules and whether the images were likely to be 'inspiring' to BAME students. Out of a total of 250 images of people on which we conducted visual content analysis, only about 12% offered images of racially minoritized people in non-stereotyped, positive and powerful roles that could be described as inspiring. Thematic analysis of actors' roles in the images showed that white actors were more likely to be depicted as political, economic, and academic leaders than Black/Asian actors, whereas Black/Asian actors were more likely to be portrayed as sports players, protestors, manual workers, or immigrants. Implications for curricular reform will be discussed.

Paper: Student calls to diversify or decolonise higher education (HE) curricula (Douglas et al. 2020; Peters 2018; Thomas and Jivraj, 2020) have grown in England as more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity (BAME) students have accessed university (HESA, 2020). To reflect this increasingly diverse student body and ensure equitable educational outcomes, researchers have also recommended curricular reform (Dale-Rivas 2019; Mountford -Zimdars et al. 2015).

Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Hylton, 2018), this study considers the racial diversity of curricula by examining the images of people used in lecture slides. Previous research, primarily in the US, has documented and critiqued stereotyped imagery in textbooks (Allen and Wallace, 2010; Eigenberg and Park 2016; Ferree and Hall, 1990; Woyshner and Schocker, 2015). Images used in HE lectures have not been studied, although teacher-developed lecture slides constitute key curricular materials and an important potential site for curricular reform. We adapted methods from textbook studies to investigate lecture imagery in first year social science modules.

Research Aims

This study explored the following questions: how are racially minoritised and white populations portrayed in the images used in lecture slides? Specifically, how frequently is each group represented relative to the proportion of students? In what roles are the 'actors' in the photographs depicted? How inspiring are the images likely to be overall to BAME students? We aimed to develop methods for visual analysis of lecture materials, prompt critical reflection on the role of images in diversifying curricular, and build the foundation for further research on the impact of lecture imagery on students' engagement and attainment.

Methods

We extracted all images (n=250) of people in lecture slides in four required first year modules in the social sciences at a mid-ranked UK institution where the staff are predominantly white and the student body is 40% BAME. The coding scheme was developed inductively using visual content analysis (Bell, 2001) then organised into higher level themes deductively, adapting categories used in textbook studies, visual content analysis and CRT concepts (Hylton, 2018). Frequency and salience were analysed, where the presence or absence of visually identifiable racially minoritised people (i.e. Black or Asian/ people of colour) was marked and their exclusiveness in the image was noted (Ferree and Hall, 1990). Then we analysed the race of primary actors in the image, in what roles they were depicted, and the political and social status of those roles (Allen and Wallace, 2010; Woyshner and Schocker, 2015) (Table1). Finally, we considered whether the image overall was likely to be 'inspiring' to BAME students (i.e. whether people of colour were depicted in positive or high status roles to which students may wish to aspire, rather than absent, under-represented, or depicted in stereotypical or marginalised roles or as social problems).

Results

Only one third of the images included people of colour, compared to 40% of the student body. Notably, people of colour were less likely to be presented exclusively (13%) in an image than white people (67%). Overall, four in ten roles (39%) were interpreted as 'Power', followed by 'Social problem' (22%), 'Daily life' (22%), 'Other jobs' (12%) and 'Immigrant' (3%). Only 24% of the Black or Asian actors were in roles related to 'Power', which included 'Jobs with state-sanctioned authority' (e.g. politician, police, soldier, teacher, healthcare worker) and 'Business or thought leaders' (e.g. executive board, scholar, journalist), compared to almost half of the total white actors (46%). White actors were more likely to be depicted as political, economic, and academic leaders than actors from racially minoritised groups, whereas racially minoritised people were more likely to be portrayed as sports players, protestors, manual workers, or immigrants (Table2 & Figure1). Only about 12% of images were likely to be inspiring to BAME students.

Discussion

Racially minoritised people appeared less frequently in lecture slides than amongst the student audience for those images, although they were represented more often than in the general population. They were also less likely to be presented in positions of power. The imagery provided few opportunities for BAME students to see themselves in roles to which they might aspire with a degree. This absence may negatively influence their engagement and success, though more research

is needed to establish this link.

Transformational education is intended to create a more socially just and equitable society (hooks, 1993). To realise that vision, lecturers could present images that do not merely reproduce the current social order but offer inspirational imagery that normalises the presence of people of colour in positive, powerful roles.

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Table 1. Thematic analysis results at three coding stages

Role description/ In Vivo coding	Second coding/ clustering	Theme
Executive board, Business man or Woman, IMF director Journalist, Scholar	Business or thought leaders	Power 136 (39.2%)
Politician, Army general, Queen, Royal family Soldier, Police Teacher, Healthcare worker, Nurse, Pharmacist	Jobs with state- sanctioned authority	
Electrician, Fast food server, Builder, Manufactory workers Miners, Seasonal worker, Delivery man, Mechanics, Office worker	Jobs without state- sanctioned authority	Other jobs 42 (12.1%)
Actor or actress, sport player, model	Celebrity	
Protesting (Black Lives Matter, Trade Union, anti-war, pro-EEC, Miners' strike) Criminal, Prisoner, Juvenile delinquent Victim (Murder, kidnap, war) Arguing, Fighting, Graffiti	Social conflict	Social problem 77 (22.2%)
Child in poverty debt-related, unemployed	Poverty	
NHS patients, elderly	The vulnerable	
Lascar sailors, Polish immigrant, European immigrant	Immigrant	Immigrant

Windrush generation worker		10 (2.9%)
Commuter, Crowd Daily activity related, Holiday makers Student	Daily life activity	Daily life 75 (21.6%)
Family (mother, father, couple, children, baby) Bride	Family-related	
Youth programme participants, Adolescent, Young people	Youth-related	
Science experiment participant, Lady Clough, Eton school students & Local boys, Lady escorted by police, Female voter	Unclassified	Unclassified 7 (2.0%)

Table 2 Thematic coding results by ethnicity

	Power	Other jobs	Social problem	Immigrant	Daily life
BAME (N=89, 26.2%)	21	18	20	6	24
% of total BAME actors	23.6	20.2	22.5	6.7	27.0
% of total actors	6.2	5.3	5.9	1.8	7.1
White (N=251, 73.8%)	115	24	57	4	51
% of total White actors	45.8	9.6	22.7	1.6	20.3
% of total actors	33.8	7.1	16.8	1.2	15.0

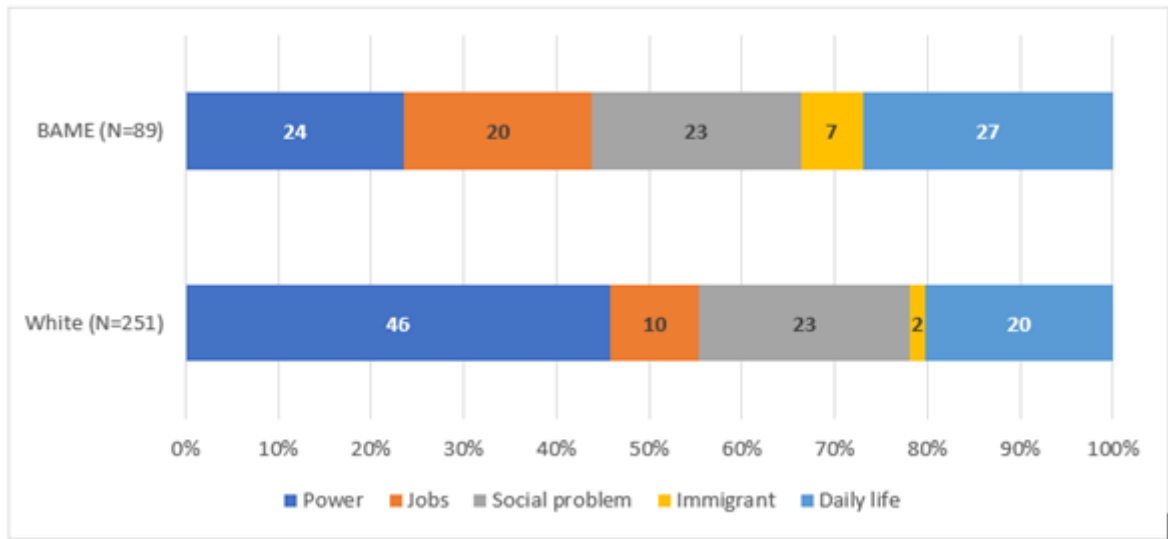


Figure 1. Thematic coding results by ethnicity