



## Drawing Exercises Can Promote Discussion in Social Science Courses

### What is this Research About?

Although drawing is used as a teaching technique in the visual arts and some science disciplines, drawing is used less often in teaching sociology. Research suggests that drawing can be used as a communication tool to express thoughts and feeling that may be difficult to express verbally. This teaching technique can be useful in sociology courses to promote discussion of difficult topics such as racial bias. In this article, the researcher details his experiences using drawing exercises to discuss race and gender in his sociology classes.

### What did the Researchers Do?

The researcher conducted in-class drawing exercises with his sociology students. Students were instructed to draw a pretty child on one piece of paper, and a bully on another. The drawings included a full body and a name for the characters. The students hung their drawings on separate sides of the board, and observed the drawings, noting any trends. The researcher and the students discussed their observations. The researcher assessed the activity by collecting end-of-semester reflection papers from students across eight sections of his course. The papers asked students to describe two memorable classroom activities and explain what they learned. The researcher analyzed these qualitative data to identify themes in the responses.

### What did the Researchers Find?

The bully tended to be depicted as male with either dark or no colours and an abrupt sounding name. Most students depicted the pretty child as a blond, blue-eyed girl with bright coloured clothing. Almost all white and African American students depicted the pretty child as “white-looking”. By reviewing past research, the researcher suggests that this may be a result of internalized bias against African American features. Comments made by students suggest that they acknowledged and identified trends and racial biases within the drawings and the prevalence of racial biases in society. Students were able to recall details of the activity at the end of the semester suggesting that visualization activities may help students retain information.

# SoTL

## Snapshot

A synopsis of a scholarship of teaching and learning journal article

### ➔ How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom

Drawing exercises can be a useful teaching tool to promote class discussions of sensitive topics such as racial bias. In this activity, students in an introductory sociology course drew pictures of “a pretty child” and “a bully.” Students then observed the drawings and discussed characteristics of the drawings. This teaching activity is useful for discussing topics including racial bias, gender norms and the social construction of race and gender. Students reported that this exercise was memorable and useful in helping them understand these difficult concepts.

### ➔ Citation

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### ➔ Keywords

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