Students' Perceptions of Diversity and Inclusion in an Accounting Firm's Recruitment Photos: Implications for the Accounting Professional Pipeline

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines how post-secondary students perceive photographs from the recruitment website of a Big 4 accounting firm. We survey accounting/business students (n=366) and gather their written observations and interpretations of photographs conveying messages about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We analyze responses and how they vary based on students' visible minority status and gender using natural language processing techniques. Our investigation reveals the most prominent features students observe, including facial expressions, clothing, accessories, and design elements. Students often highlight smiles as the most striking feature. When interpreting the photographs as potential employees interested in DEI, responses suggest that a white man is seen as the norm against which DEI is assessed. We find that gender and race influence students' interpretations of diversity in recruitment photographs. These findings have implications for the accounting pipeline, students seeking employment, schools developing DEI curricula, and firms crafting recruitment strategies to attract diverse talent.

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