

# All Else Being Equal (When It's Not Equal)

*Applying Theories on Race in Quantitative Models and Research*

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Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE)

Critical Perspectives in Quantitative Methods Series Webinar 2

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How I  
came to  
this work...

Ongoing personal and professional learning,  
struggles to identify quantitative relevance

Ongoing quantitative training, struggled to identify  
space for acknowledging race

Identifying deep distrust of quantitative methods  
among communities of action and practice

Personal intersecting identities and absence of my  
reality from quantitative design

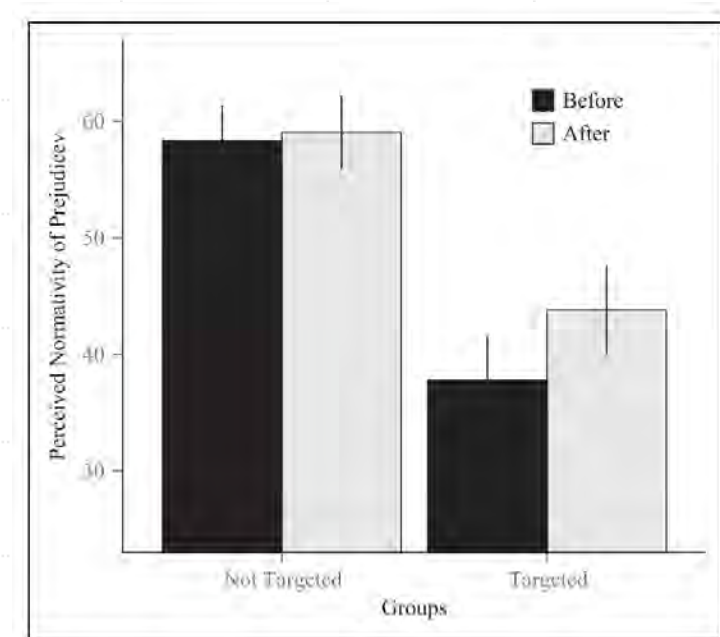
Trying to teach in ways that don't replicate my  
experiences, finding little foundation in theory

# Review of QuantCrit Tenets

1. Centrality of racism, not readily quantifiable
  2. Categories aren't natural, requires interrogation
  3. Numbers aren't natural, requires interrogation
  4. Quantitative work is subjective, need to uplift minoritized people
  5. Statistics do not have inherent meaning, but can advance justice
- (Garcia, López, & Vélez, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington, & Demack, 2018)

# A Social Politics Addition

- Many analyses of quantitative relationship with White supremacy aim historically; this is important.
- But also, what is happening now?



**Figure 1.** The normative acceptability of prejudice toward groups targeted and not targeted by the Trump campaign, before and after the November 2016 election.

(Crandall, Miller, & White, 2018)



# A Social Politics Addition

- Long-standing and developing body of research on *why* people (esp. Americans) resist racial justice efforts (esp. for Black people), some major theoretical approaches:
  - Beliefs about Black people (e.g., symbolic racism, stereotyped beliefs, essentialism)
  - Self-Interest of White people (e.g., group conflict theories, group comparisons, economic and political threat, White anxieties)
  - Beliefs about racial inequality and fairness (e.g., colorblind egalitarianism, individualism, justification of status quo)
- (For reviews, see: Bobo & Fox, 2003; Cramer, 2020; Krysan, 2000)

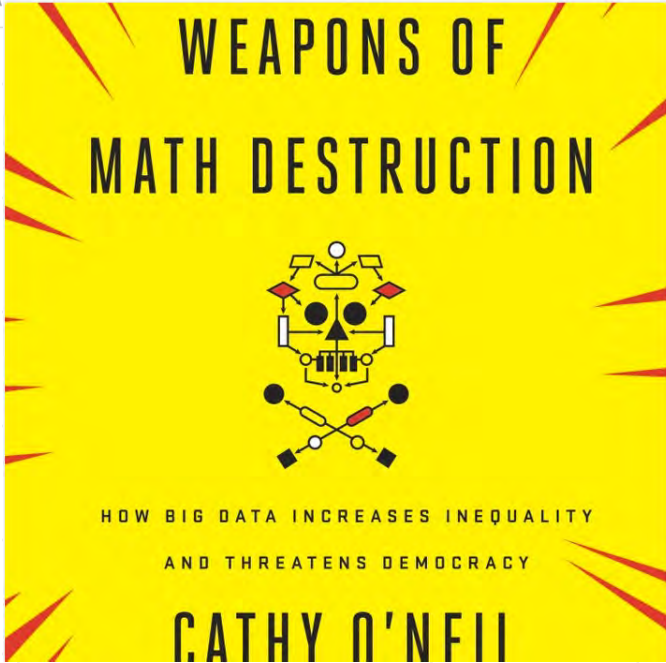
# A Social Politics Addition

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  - Beliefs about Black people (e.g., symbols, stereotypes, essentialism)
  - Self-Interest of White people (e.g., group identity, economic and political threat, White privilege, comparisons, individualism)
  - Beliefs about racial inequality and fairness (e.g., meritocracy, individualism, justification of status quo)
- (For reviews, see: Bobo & Fox, 2003; Cramer, 2020; Krysan, 2000)

Which of these do you think could be affected by quantitative research practice?

# Sprinkle: Racist mathematics or 'racism propounded as antiracism'? | COMMENTARY

By M.K. SPRINKLE  
CARROLL COUNTY TIMES | MAR 13, 2021 AT 5:30 AM



FEBRUARY 8, 2017



CODE-DEPENDENT: PROS AND CONS OF THE ALGORITHM AGE

## Theme 3: Humanity and human judgment are lost when data and predictive modeling become paramount

BY LEE RAINIE AND JANNA ANDERSON

Many respondents said that as people put too much faith in data, humanity can be lost.

Some argued that because technology corporations and, sometimes, governments are most

CULTURE / DATA

## Are We Losing Humanity with Data-Driven Medicine?

27 May 2018 9:00am, by David Cassel



## Is Statistics Racist?



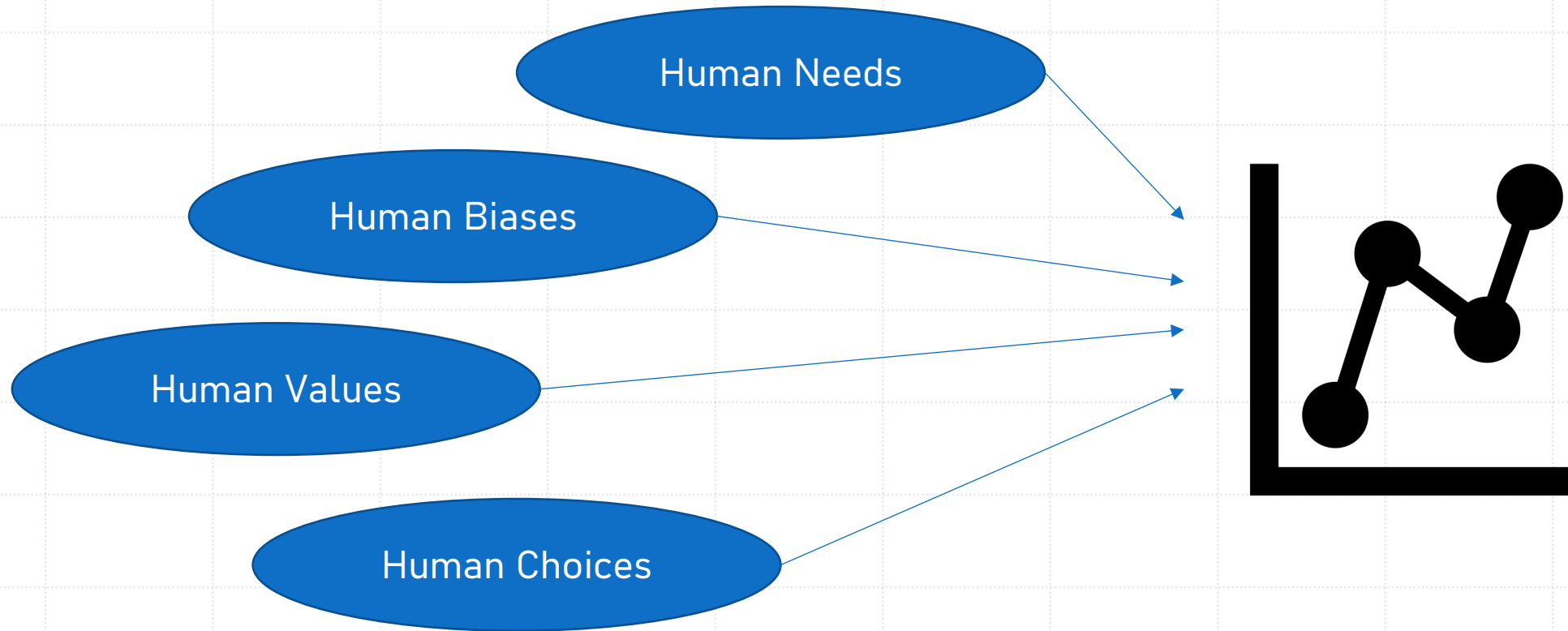
Daniel Cleather Follow

Mar 11, 2020 · 9 min read ★

A number of the most important

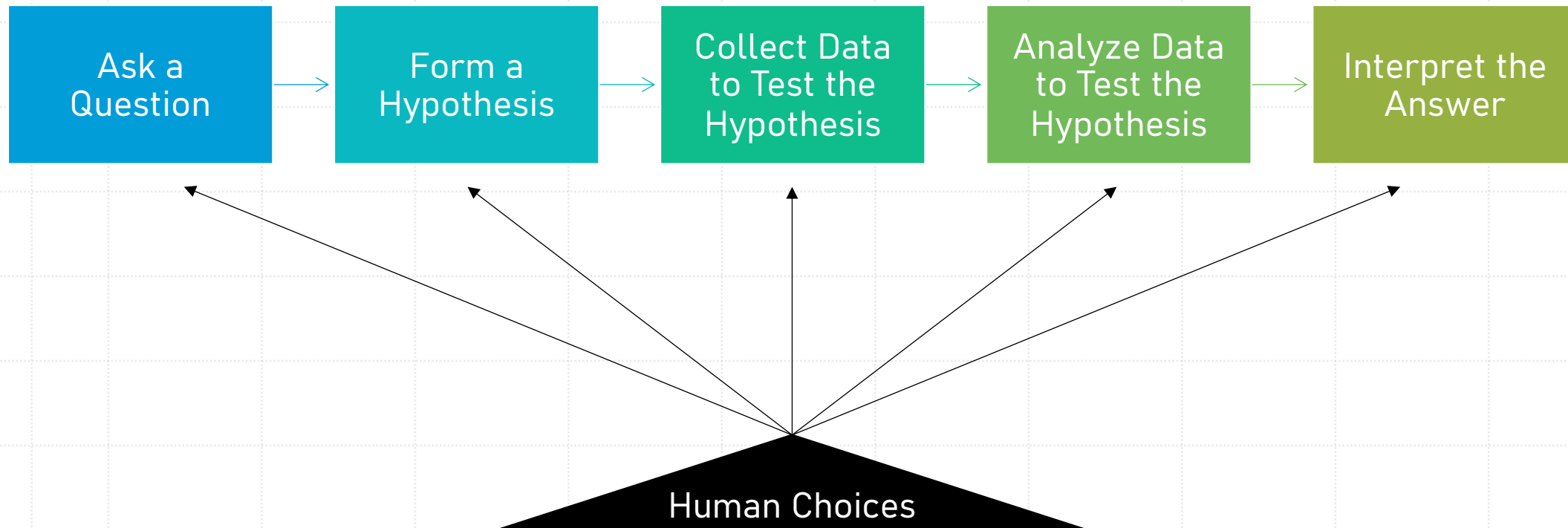


# Data Cannot “Speak for Itself”





# Data Cannot “Speak for Itself”





# Some General Implications

- Ensuring power (not just voice) of minoritized voices in design and analysis
- Recognizing positionality and identifying actual impacts on practice
- Re-considering norms about data ownership
- Intentional questions around sampling, representation, and voice
- Asking critical research questions and being involved in justice work



# Implications for Model Building, Analysis, and Interpretation

*(Many implications, covering a couple here.)*

1. Informed, intentional thought about what we are doing, and why, when we decide to include race in our quantitative models
2. Principled choices about how we explain what we have done and found

# What Do I Mean By 'Race?'

- (Cannot cover all theoretical perspectives on race here...)
- As example, what does it mean to be "Asian?"

*Sociolegal Constructions*



*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*

*ImgSrc: <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/thind-v-united-states%E2%80%8B/>*

# What Do I Mean By 'Race?'

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## *Political Constructions*



Example: The model minority myth and resistance to affirmative action by White conservatives (e.g., Garces & Poon, 2018; Inkelas, 2003; Jo, 2004)

Source: <https://www.wbez.org/stories/how-asian-americans-became-the-model-minority/c519cdcb-518e-4b02-8124-1bf28e60b4bd>

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*Political Constructions*



"We were not born Asian American but rather gave birth to ourselves as Asian Americans as a political identity to be seen and heard." (Ishizuka, 2016)

Example: The Asian American Political Alliance (1968)

ImgSrc:  
[https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Asian\\_American\\_Political\\_Alliance\\_\(AAPA\)](https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Asian_American_Political_Alliance_(AAPA))


# What Do I Mean By 'Race?'

From Yoon et al. (2017) study of identity development among East Asian adolescents from immigrant families:

- (Cannot cover all theoretical perspectives on race here...)
- As example, what does it mean to be “Asian?”
- Tradition and Shared History: “Every Saturday—almost every Saturday, Sunday night, I go to my cousin’s house and we have a big family meal and after that we chill with our parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins.”
- Overlapping Identities” “Well, basically at home it will be Asian culture, and when I’m outside of home it is everything American. I think I’m forgetting my Chinese too because of that.”
- Cultural Representation: “I feel like in media and movies and such, Asian characters are portrayed in such a small, restrictive setting . . . there’s always either the guy who’s really good at kung fu, the girl who’s really smart and she’s in math and science...”

*Cultural Constructions*

(And variations within)



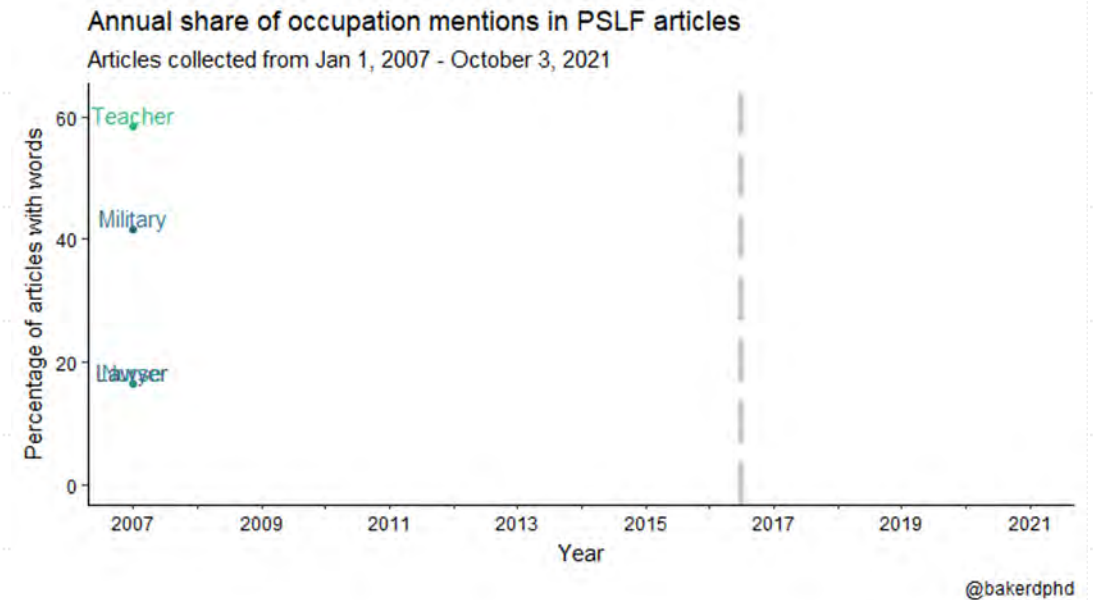
# Using Race Requires Understanding Race

- Informs choices about operationalization of race in data collection and management
- Informs choices about modeling role of race (/racism) in statistical method



# Data Communication as Method

- Writing *is* analysis. Writing *is* political.
  - Writing and communication as integral to method is often discussed in qualitative research (e.g., Butler-Kisber, 2020; Cook & Dixon, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Wolcott, 2008)
- Considering communication as method is not new to quantitative researchers either



ImgSrc: Twitter, @djbaker



# Explaining Racialized Statistics

The way we  
talk about  
statistical  
patterns  
across  
racialized  
groups  
matters

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Arguably, the “achievement gap” versus “educational debt” distinction, and other challenges to the way we discuss student comparisons (e.g., Carey, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Quinn, 2020)

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Deficit orientations for Black students (e.g., Lasater, Bengtson, & Albiladi; Meissel et al., 2017)

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Stereotype threat and internalized lower expectations (e.g., García & Guerra, 2004; Cherng, 2017)

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Generally, the ability of uncritical statistical analyses to perpetuate “statistical essentialism” and racism (Hicks, 2015; Strevens, 2000; Zuberi, 2001)

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Social politics: What do people believe about racial inequality?

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# Consequences and Implications

If we understand...

Uncritical uses of racial differences contribute to unjust orientations toward marginalized people

Tendency of people to interpret racial statistics in a way that reifies essentialist racial distinctions

Importance of people's understanding of *why* racial inequality exists for their political orientations toward justice

*AND we understand...*

Active acknowledgement of and resistance to injustice is a part of our responsibility as social scientists

We have the ability to make better subjective choices in our analyses and writing

We should...

Continue to be cognizant of and thoughtful about the ways in which our words, however well intentioned, may be interpreted

Strive for statistical models and explanations that emphasize, where necessary, anti-essentialism

Employ structural analyses of racial statistics as much as possible



# How Are We Doing?

- Ongoing work looking at the ways in which race is used and explained in quantitative research
- Of the ~280 quantitative articles we have coded thus far ~100 have used race as a control variable
  - Of these, only ~1/3 included *any* explanation of the substantive reason why race was included in the model
  - About ~1/2 included any explanation of the results for the racial analyses
    - (And these are is under the broadest inclusion criteria, at the moment, so not critically-oriented)
- Future work includes finishing the coding analyses, critical analysis of those explanations that do exist, assessing interpretations among educators, testing framing interventions, etc.



# Concluding Comments (Before Activity)

- Beyond acknowledgement: constant engagement in action and spaces where action takes place
- Continued personal growth and engagement in learning
- Active engagement in the discourse about and construction of secondary data
- No quantitative variable is just a variable, race is no exception, but as a *political* imperative, race requires our attention



# Norms for Within-Group Conversations

- Baseline that racism is a problem and, for right now, is the problem under discussion
  - If speaking from experience, consistent use of “I” statements
    - Understanding this dialogue as developmental
      - Stepping up and stepping back
- Acknowledging varying emotional experiences with racism in quantitative methods
  - Striving for thoughtfulness, not perfect conclusions

# Context

A graduate in a black gown and cap stands on a stone staircase in a grand building. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from a window above, creating a contemplative atmosphere. The graduate is looking to the right, away from the camera.

- A situation that is probably relatively common for most people here: Conducting or consulting on a quantitative analysis that on its face, does not center race but does incorporate it as a control variable
- What is the effect of participation in college student government association on students' engagement and retention in higher education?
- (Link will be provided)



# Questions to Discuss

- *Why is race being included in this model?*
- *What is the actual theoretical explanation through which race matters for this question? Does it work differently for different racial groups?*
- *What social construction(s) of race as a variable would be relevant to this theory (e.g., sociolegal, political, cultural)?*
- *How might you operationalize race to try and capture that construction? Any limitations of the typical approaches?*
- *How do we critically understand why race as defined above came to matter in this social process? How have these processes been racialized by structural forces?*
- *What would be unjust and uncritical answers that people might give for why race is related to these constructs, and how might not explaining the critical interpretation of race in your model leave those answers unchallenged?*



# Implications for Practice

1. *What do you need to explain to people about the role of race in this study and the way it is being used in your model?*
2. *What do you need to make sure to explain in your results?*
3. *What do you think you should read and know more about to be able to fully understand the role of race in this question?*

**Link to Context/Questions:**

- <https://bit.ly/3vfMBKz>



**All Else Being Equal (When It's Not Equal)**  
**Applying Theories on Race in Quantitative Models and Research**  
*Small-Group Application Questions*

RQ: What is the effect of participation in college student government association on students' engagement and retention in higher education (controlling for race)?

Questions to Consider

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2. What is the actual theoretical explanation through which race matters for this question? Does it work differently for different racial groups?
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6. What would be *unjust* and *uncritical* answers that people might give for why race is related to these constructs, and how might not explaining the critical interpretation of race in your model leave those answers unchallenged?

Implications for Practice

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