

Disrupting Quantitative Monoracism in Institutional Research: Critical Considerations for Multiracial Categorization

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Abstract

While the Two or More Races category has been the de facto mechanism to count multiracial college students since 2010, little research has critically examined how this category has been used in institutional research contexts. Extending previous scholarship on monoracism in higher education, we define *quantitative monoracism* as the policies, practices, and processes by which monoracial categories are elevated and multiraciality is erased in quantitative research. Quantitative monoracism harms those who do not fit monoracial categories by rendering their nuanced needs invisible in statistical analyses. Grounded in quantitative critical race theory and critical multiracial theory, we advance a series of guiding questions and illustrate their application to a case study in hopes of amplifying anti-monoracist action in institutional research.

Keywords: Two or More Races, multiracial, monoracism, institutional research

INTRODUCTION

Prior to federal guidance establishing a Two or More Races (TOMR) reporting category, higher education institutions lacked a formal mechanism to account for multiraciality in campus data systems (Renn & Lunceford, 2004). Institutional research (IR) offices and professionals are often responsible for meeting external reporting requirements, including a series of mandatory annual surveys via the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (Jones et al., 2022). In October 2007, to align with the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, the U.S. Department of Education released new IPEDS race/ethnicity reporting guidelines (including a new TOMR reporting category) with required implementation by the 2010–2011 academic year (IPEDS, n.d.). Surveyed senior IR professionals noted, “[Coordinating] institutional response to federal race/ethnicity changes” is a prominent job task (Lillibridge et al., 2016, p. 28). However, the TOMR category is a flawed proxy for measuring multiraciality (Johnston-Guerrero & Ford, 2020; Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016), and little research has critically examined how the growing population of multiracial college students has impacted IR processes. This lack of attention to multiraciality in IR is especially concerning considering recently announced updates to the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 (Orvis, 2024), which establishes a new minimum category (Middle Eastern and North African) and calls for collecting race/ethnicity data in a combined question. These updates create a host of new categorical combinations to be reported as Multiracial and/or Multiethnic (formerly TOMR). We assert that it is a

strategic imperative for IR professionals to reflect on challenges and opportunities associated with TOMR data in preparation for updated guidance from IPEDS to align with new Office of Management and Budget standards.

A session at the Association for Institutional Research's (AIR) 2015 AIR Forum conference described the TOMR category as a symbolic “break’ between the old and new” practices related to race/ethnicity data collection and reporting in higher education (AIR, 2015, p. 38). As Osei-Kofi (2012) claimed, dominant discourses in education ahistorically position multiraciality as a *new* phenomenon signaling progress toward a post-racial (thus, post-racist) society. To be clear, we contend that racism is ever-present in contemporary society, including in IR contexts, and we echo Osei-Kofi's argument that discourses of multiraciality tend to strengthen rather than subvert racial categorization. Beyond IPEDS reporting requirements, IR professionals have varying degrees of agency in shaping how race data are collected and categorized—how multiraciality is counted or concealed—at the campus level. It is within this latitude that we assert IR professionals could (un)intentionally perpetuate monoracism (Johnston & Nadal, 2010) by privileging monoracial categories in policy and practice. Therefore, we aim to advance a series of guiding questions toward the disruption of what we term *quantitative monoracism* in IR. To begin, we ground our work in relevant literature, offer a working definition of quantitative monoracism, and outline the theoretical frameworks that inform our proposed questions. Then, we review the series of guiding questions, apply them to a case study, discuss applying the framework more broadly, and conclude with recommendations for using these prompts in IR contexts.

SITUATING MONORACISM IN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH THROUGH THE LITERATURE

To contextualize our guiding questions, we first synthesize extant literature related to monoracism and IR.

What Is Monoracism?

Johnston and Nadal (2010) defined *monoracism* as a system of oppression rooted in “assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories” (p. 125). Monoracism operates on both systemic and interpersonal levels, and is enacted vertically to enshrine White supremacy, enacted horizontally by communities of color, and internalized by those who do not fit monoracial categories (e.g., multiracial people, transracial adoptees) (Guillermo-Wann & Johnston, 2012; Harris, 2016; Harris, Johnston-Guerrero, et al., 2021). There is a growing body of literature that focuses on monoracism at the interpersonal level, with an emphasis on multiracial microaggressions in higher education contexts (e.g., Harris, 2017a, 2017b; Harris, Snider, et al., 2021). However, Hamako (2014) argued that attention to interpersonal manifestations of monoracism can overlook “systemic privileging of things, people, and practices that are racialized as ‘single-race’ and/or ‘racially pure’” (p. 81). Policies that guide the recognition of and/or (re)classification of multiraciality in educational data systems are an example of monoracism at the systemic level (Johnston-Guerrero & Ford, 2020; Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016; Wong-Campbell & Ramrakhiani, 2024). While such policies are often interpreted and implemented by IR professionals, there is a dearth of scholarship examining monoracism in IR contexts.

The Work of Institutional Researchers

Terenzini (1993) outlined three tiers of intelligence that effective IR professionals must use. These are (1) technical/analytical intelligence (foundational data management skills and fluency in research design/methods), (2) issues intelligence (political savvy and decision-making support), and (3) contextual intelligence (deep understanding of institutional history and operations). Notably, Terenzini’s (1993) only explicit reference to race is found in tier one as an example of requisite “familiarity with the standard categories and definitions of basic terms” (p. 3). Even after Terenzini updated these tiers (Terenzini, 2013)—noting the increasing racial diversity of higher education—they did not include additional knowledge and skills aimed at reducing racism in IR processes. This aligns with Abrica and Rivas’s (2017) observation that advocacy for racial equity is “not routinely part of IR work” (p. 44). However, scholars have pushed for an increase in equity-minded, race-conscious practices in IR (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Dowd et al., 2012), including Baxter’s (2020) call to reimagine IR professionals as “facilitators of organizational learning about race and racism” (p. 2). While there is no shortage of scholarly attention to the relationship between quantitative data and power (e.g., D’Ignazio and Klein’s [2020] data feminism and Walter’s [2013] Indigenous statistics), these critical considerations do not appear to be widely engaged in IR literature. One exception is a series of special issues dedicated to quantitative criticalism in *New Directions for Institutional Research* (see Stage, 2007; Stage & Wells, 2014; Wells & Stage, 2015); however, that journal is no longer publishing new content. Moreover, practices that amplify or alleviate monoracism in IR are underexplored.

Theoretical Framework: Quantitative Monoracism

We define *quantitative monoracism* as the policies, practices, and processes by which monoracial categories are elevated and multiraciality is erased in quantitative research. We apply two theoretical lenses to advance a model for disrupting quantitative monoracism in IR contexts: quantitative critical race theory (QuantCrit; Gillborn et al., 2018) and critical multiracial theory (MultiCrit; Harris, 2016). Both QuantCrit and MultiCrit are extensions of critical race theory (CRT), which emerged from the field of legal studies to interrogate the foundational role of racism in social structures (see Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and has since been applied in research across multiple fields, including higher education (e.g., Patton, 2016).

Amplifying the chorus of scholarly voices engaging the possibilities and tensions at the intersection of CRT and quantitative methods (see Garcia et al., 2018), Gillborn et al. (2018) articulated five principles of QuantCrit. First, QuantCrit acknowledges the centrality of racism in quantitative research. Second, QuantCrit contends that numbers are not neutral, but instead reflect and reify White supremacy. Third, QuantCrit asserts that categories are not natural (they are socially constructed) and locates inequity not as a deficit of race but rather as a product of racism. Fourth, QuantCrit resists the notion that data can speak for themselves by emphasizing the role racialized assumptions and interpretations play in quantitative analyses. Finally, QuantCrit advances a social justice and equity orientation toward quantitative research. As Castillo and Gillborn (2022) succinctly stated, QuantCrit is a tool to “reimagine the role that research and data can play in an anti-racist society” (p. 3).

While QuantCrit interrogates racism in quantitative research broadly, MultiCrit is a complementary lens through which to examine a nuanced form of racism: monoracism. MultiCrit adapts four original CRT tenets: (1) challenge to ahistoricism, (2) interest convergence, (3) experiential knowledge, and (4) challenge to dominant ideology. In addition, MultiCrit more distinctly reframes an additional four tenets: (5) racism, monoracism, and colorism; (6) a monoracial paradigm of race; (7) differential micro-racialization; and (8) intersections of multiple racial identities (Harris, 2016). While we incorporate each of these tenets throughout our guiding questions, we particularly emphasize the monoracial paradigm of race that can “push, pull, and erase multiracial students” (Harris, 2016, p. 805). To our knowledge, MultiCrit and QuantCrit have not been used in tandem in extant research on IR. Just as QuantCrit questions the constructed nature of categories (Gillborn et al., 2018), MultiCrit resists normative notions that “race exists in neat, defined, monoracial categories” (Harris, 2016, p. 797). As such, pairing MultiCrit with QuantCrit provides a strong theoretical foundation for considering anti-monoracist approaches to quantitative research in IR.

Positionality Statement: Who We Are

QuantCrit asserts that data cannot speak for themselves and foregrounds the role of researchers in shaping analyses (Gillborn et al., 2018). As such, we outline how our own identities and lived experiences inform our approach to the current project.

Jacob is a doctoral student in a higher education program at a large, public, research-intensive university in the Midwest. He identifies as a multiracial (Asian/White) and multiethnic (Chinese/Filipino) cisgender man, and his professional experience as a data analyst at a large, public

university on the West Coast undergirds his research interests in the quantification of (mixed) race in higher education.

Ashley holds a doctorate in curriculum and instruction and identifies as a White, cisgender woman. Her professional experiences include previous roles as an educator in the high school setting and instructional facilitator for more than 10 years. Currently, she serves as Director of Data Analytics and Institutional Research for a professional healthcare educational institution in the central United States. Both her professional and personal experiences led to her research interests in the representation of the TOMR category and underrepresented minorities (URM).

Marc is an academic administrator and faculty member in a college of education at a mid-sized, private research university in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. He identifies as a mixed race (Filipino and White), queer, cisgender man, whose scholarly agenda and praxis has centered around race and multiraciality for 20 years. His work has foregrounded multiracial individuals as an additional approach toward racial justice and the dismantling of White supremacist hierarchies by interrogating the structures and categories that maintain such hierarchies.

Naunihal is a naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in India, is Muslim, and identifies as a cisgender woman. Her training is in pharmacology (master's and doctorate); she has worked in the realms of biotechnology research as a scientist, and in academia as a faculty member in medical education. Her passion, work, and lived experiences involve the integration of both pharmacology and diversity, equity, and inclusion in medical education.

Rather than position ourselves as neutral actors, QuantCrit pushes us to name our collective commitment and equity orientation toward leveraging data to unsettle (mono)racist practices in IR.

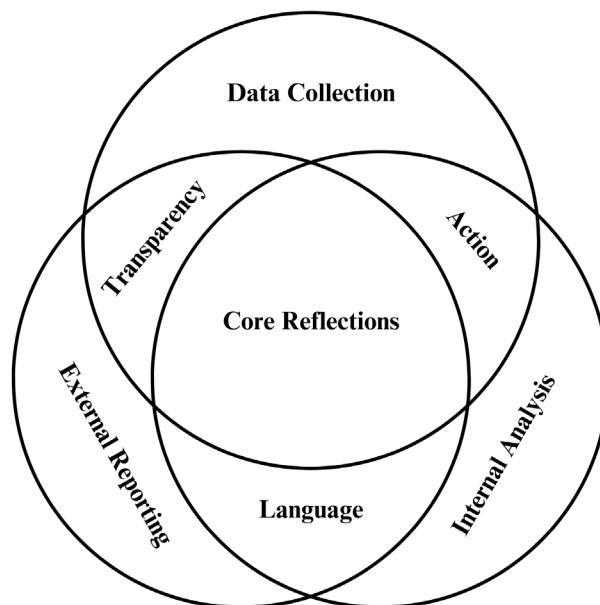
GUIDING QUESTIONS TO INFORM INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH METHODS

Building on Castillo and Gillborn's (2022) guide for operationalizing QuantCrit in practice and bolstered by key tenets of MultiCrit, we offer a series of reflective questions to advance anti-monoracism in IR (see Table 1). We present these questions visually within a set of interconnected circles in Figure 1. First, we ground the framework in core reflections (at the center). Then, we focus on three primary domains of IR: (1) data collection, (2) external reporting, and (3) internal analysis. Recognizing that these domains are not mutually exclusive, we pose broader questions around three themes that speak to their intersections: (1) transparency, (2) language, and (3) action. Although we focus on applications of these guiding questions in IR contexts, we assert that they may have broader relevance in (and beyond) higher education research.

Table 1. Guiding Questions to Disrupt Quantitative Monoracism in Institutional Research

Core Reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do monoracial categories benefit or exclude? • Whose agency is amplified or diminished? • How is monoracism mitigated or maintained?
Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are questions about race aligned with intended use(s) of data? • What restrictions are in place? • How are updates made?
External Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does (dis)aggregation essentialize or expand racial categories? • How is multiraciality visually represented? • What incentives drive displays of data?
Internal Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is race defined/contextualized at the campus level? • Does analysis rely on or resist discrete categories? • How might anti-monoracist practices reduce erasure of small groups?
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways are institutional (re)categorization practices made visible?
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are racial identity and racial category differentiated/conflated?
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the material impacts of anti-monoracist data collection/analysis?

Figure 1. Framework to Disrupt Quantitative Monoracism in Institutional Research



Core Reflections

WHO DO MONORACIAL CATEGORIES BENEFIT OR EXCLUDE?

This framing emphasizes the use of socially constructed categories as “controlling devices” (Gillborn et al., 2018, p. 15) in educational research, and the selective recognition of multiraciality as a function of institutional interests (Harris, 2016). Thus, we call for critical attention to when (and why) multiracial categories (e.g., TOMR) are included or obscured from quantitative practice. If multiraciality is measured in such a way that monoracial communities of color are undercounted, who benefits? If multiracial student data are deemed *too complicated* to include in analysis of retention and graduation rates, who is harmed? Standards established by federal, state, and programmatic agencies define the methodology for (mono- and multi-) racial coding. These standards limit how IR professionals represent ethnicity and race in externally mandated reporting, often with little incentive to exceed minimum requirements. We acknowledge that such standards constrain, but do not foreclose, more-expansive racial/ethnic data collection, reporting, and analysis. Within the confines of external mandates and institutional priorities, IR professionals make choices in how they conduct analyses, and these choices are not without consequences.

WHOSE AGENCY IS AMPLIFIED OR DIMINISHED?

MultiCrit centers the voices and lived experiences of multiracial students in higher education contexts, and QuantCrit aims to foreground such experiential knowledge in quantitative research (Gillborn et al., 2018; Harris, 2016). As such, IR professionals should consider how their decisions silence or support multiracial voices. Whose voices are diminished when multiraciality is relegated to

an “Other” category? Whose voices are honored when we consider, rather than conceal, categorical complexity? Within their spheres of influence, we believe IR professionals have a responsibility to elevate (not erase) multiracial voices.

HOW IS MONORACISM MITIGATED OR MAINTAINED?

QuantCrit explicitly names the centrality of racism in statistics (Gillborn et al., 2018), and MultiCrit provides a lens to articulate how monoracism is similarly embedded in quantitative practices (Harris, 2016). If data can be used to advance racist lies (Zuberi, 2003), so too can data assert multiracial truths. We contend that resisting discrete racial categories is a necessary step toward more-authentic (counter)storytelling with data, and IR professionals have varied levels of positional power to push for practices that reflect multiracial realities.

Data Collection

ARE QUESTIONS ABOUT RACE ALIGNED WITH INTENDED USE(S) OF DATA?

Research shows that the wording and stated purpose(s) of race data collection influences multiracial claims (Franco, 2015; Johnston et al., 2014). As such, we elevate the use of more-purposeful race questions as conceptualized by Johnston et al. (2014). For example, collecting data on racial ancestry (e.g., “What is your racial background?”) and racial identity (e.g., “How do you racially identify?”) require distinct wording (see Johnston et al. [2014] for additional examples), which might not align with one’s “street race” based on appearance (López & Hogan, 2021). To advance anti-monoracism in IR, it is essential to align the collection of race data with intended use(s).

WHAT RESTRICTIONS ARE IN PLACE?

At a minimum, respondents should have the option to select more than one race on demographic forms. This option should extend to subgroups within racial categories, because forced-choice questions at this level invisibilize multiethnic students. We encourage the collection of race data in multiple ways, including an option to self-report multiraciality rather than solely relying on the TOMR proxy. We acknowledge that external mandates exert pressure on how race data are collected such that they can be aggregated into required reporting categories (e.g., IPEDS). Even so, there are multiple models of universities that collect detailed race/ethnicity data beyond minimum requirements (see University of California, 2022). While we do not suggest a one-size-fits-all approach with prescribed categories for inclusion, we posit that decisions to collect more-detailed race/ethnicity categories should be made in consultation with the campus community. For example, in response to student advocacy (see Jarrah, 2020), the California State University system recently added a new Southwest Asian and North African category with detailed subgroups, such as Palestinian (California State University, n.d.). While this category is aggregated into the White count for IPEDS reporting purposes, these granular data create new opportunities to see and support students who might not be racialized as White on campus. We urge IR professionals to prioritize the most expansive, rather than the most restrictive, question formats when collecting race/ethnicity data.

HOW ARE UPDATES MADE?

Multiracial identity claims evolve over time and across contexts (Harper, 2016; Johnston et al., 2014; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Renn, 2003). As such, point-in-time data (often collected during the admission process) likely offer a skewed portrait of multiraciality on campus. Thus, we encourage IR

professionals to establish (or enhance) processes by which individuals can review and update their race/ethnicity designations. Building systems that support the fluidity of multiracial identity is an important step toward destabilizing quantitative monoracism in IR.

External Reporting

DOES (DIS)AGGREGATION ESSENTIALIZE OR EXPAND RACIAL CATEGORIES?

Institutions sometimes normalize monoracial categories on university websites by selectively grouping multiracial students (e.g., students of color) or erasing them altogether (Ford et al., 2019). We contend that disaggregation can highlight rather than hide heterogeneity within the aggregate TOMR category. This is not to suggest that aggregate groupings should be eliminated. Rather, we envision a both/and approach whereby aggregate groupings (e.g., URM students) are supplemented with more-granular data tables.

HOW IS MULTIRACIALITY VISUALLY REPRESENTED?

We ground this question in maximum representation, which is the concept and practice of counting all applicable racial/ethnic categories independently from the total of unique individuals to “enhance the probability of inclusion” (University of Washington, n.d., para. 2). While we see potential in this strategy, we also caution against the visual erasure of multiraciality. Counting students in all applicable categories and removing a TOMR category from graphical representations of demographic data may inadvertently bolster a monoracial paradigm of race (Harris, 2016). We challenge IR professionals to consider visual communication strategies that resist rigid racial boundaries (e.g., stacked bar charts).

WHAT INCENTIVES DRIVE DISPLAYS OF DATA?

We invite IR professionals to critically consider the pressures and priorities that might help or hinder increased recognition of multiraciality. Amid growing anti-DEI legislation and in a post-affirmative action era, the use of race data on college campuses could be increasingly scrutinized. We acknowledge that contextual factors influence the ways in which race/ethnicity data are shared and (in)directly impact IR offices. As QuantCrit asserts, numbers are not neutral—they reflect (and maintain) systems of power (Gillborn et al., 2018).

Internal Analysis

HOW IS RACE DEFINED/CONTEXTUALIZED AT THE CAMPUS LEVEL?

We center the importance of shared language in the data analysis phase. Some IR offices use a digital data dictionary to centralize such information and aid campus partners in navigating data request processes. Where multiple data points exist for race/ethnicity, data dictionaries can help distinguish which option is most applicable for each inquiry. We highlight the University of Hawai'i's (2009) clear guidance on the multiple ways race data are aggregated at the campus level to meet distinct internal and external priorities, and we invite IR professionals to develop similar tools that reflect their unique university context. Additionally, we stress the importance of defining terms with distinct contextual meanings (e.g., URM). MultiCrit challenges ahistoric treatment of multiraciality in higher education (Harris, 2016). For example, multiracial students might not be considered underrepresented in higher education because there have not historically been categories to measure this metric. We urge IR professionals to ensure that contemporary categories are consulted when

considering which groups are (or are not) counted as underrepresented. Furthermore, assumptions that multiracial means “White and” could influence decisions to exclude the TOMR category from URM definitions, which overlooks the racialized realities of students with multiple minoritized racial backgrounds (Talbot, 2008). Without a clear definition of URM, including explicit instructions regarding multiracial students, campus-level analyses might make inappropriate comparisons to state/federal benchmarks.

DOES ANALYSIS RELY ON OR RESIST DISCRETE CATEGORIES?

We assert that moving beyond the TOMR category in statistical analyses can provide rich results. One strategy we encourage IR professionals to consider is effect coding, which Mayhew and Simonoff (2015) asserted maintains the integrity of multiracial data and increases the accuracy of findings across all racial categories. Furthermore, MultiCrit attends to the intersections of multiple racial identities (Harris, 2016), and IR professionals can counter monolithic treatment of multiraciality by analyzing within-group differences. By considering differential experiences that the TOMR category masks, IR professionals can mitigate quantitative monoracism.

HOW MIGHT ANTI-MONORACIST PRACTICES REDUCE ERASURE OF SMALL GROUPS?

Often, small populations are excluded from quantitative analyses due to sample size. This is especially troubling among small, highly multiracial populations such as Native Americans and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (Jones et al., 2021; Shotton et al., 2024) who are disproportionately (re)categorized as TOMR (Wong-Campbell & Ramrakhiani, 2024). While we affirm the use of

data suppression thresholds (e.g., $n < 5$) that prioritize student privacy and reduce the risk of data re-identification, we challenge IR professionals to consider how maximum representation might expand opportunities to include groups in analyses from which they might otherwise be excluded due to sample size.

Transparency

IN WHAT WAYS ARE INSTITUTIONAL (RE)CATEGORIZATION PRACTICES MADE VISIBLE?

Campbell-Montalvo (2019) described the “process of change or distortion” (p. 2) applied to self-reported data for institutional reporting purposes as *racial re-formation*. We assert that racial re-formation is embedded in the IR job function, and we call on IR offices to document and display these processes. Publishing these practices holds institutions (and IR) accountable for their role in (re)shaping racial categories. Increasing transparency around current racial re-formation practices in IR can highlight barriers to and best practices for mitigating monoracism.

Language

HOW ARE RACIAL IDENTITY AND RACIAL CATEGORY DIFFERENTIATED/CONFLATED?

Here, we draw on the work of Rockquemore et al. (2009) who conceptualize racial identity (internal self-understanding) and racial category (chosen label based on available options) as analytically distinct, interrelated, and potentially less correlated for multiracial individuals. IR professionals often work with racial category data that has undergone racial re-formation for reporting purposes (e.g., IPEDS). As

such, claims about racial identity with said data are inappropriate. Instead of language like “students who identify as TOMR,” IR professionals should incorporate phrases like “students categorized as TOMR.” Small language shifts can meaningfully impact how data are interpreted and avoid conflating racial identities with racial categories.

Action

WHAT ARE THE MATERIAL IMPACTS OF ANTI-MONORACIST DATA COLLECTION/ANALYSIS?

We stress that data do not exist in isolation from the lived experiences of those they represent. Rather, IR can leverage data toward tangible impact. Making multiraciality more visible in campus data systems (e.g., enrollment dashboards) may amplify the need for increased multiracial-focused programming, and may catalyze intentional efforts to make monoracially organized spaces more inclusive for multiracial students. QuantCrit contends that racial categories have racist consequences, and MultiCrit centers the multiracial realities that monoracial categories consistently collapse (Gillborn et al., 2018; Harris, 2016). In the quest for more just higher education contexts, IR professionals have the opportunity and responsibility to advocate for and apply anti-monoracist action in their approaches to data collection, analysis, and reporting.

CASE STUDY: THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE TWO OR MORE RACES CATEGORY

We present a real-life case using hypothetical numbers to demonstrate how the guiding questions above might help IR professionals navigating similar dynamics and decisions. Although developed separately, we bring our framework and this case together to suggest broader recommendations for IR.

Expanding and Contextualizing URM

The Arkansas Colleges of Health Education (ACHE) serves as the parent institution for the Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine (ARCOM), which trains doctors of osteopathic medicine. Given the continued disparities in racial representation within the healthcare field, reporting to programmatic agencies is necessary for tracking trends. Programmatic agencies such as the Association of American Medical Colleges and the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) use race/ethnicity codes to identify trends in representation. This case captures complexities in how the healthcare field defines URM and, more specifically, underrepresented in medicine (URiM), with a focus on students who selected multiple race categories on their application forms. The Association of American Medical Colleges (2024)

defines *URiM* as “racial and ethnic populations that are underrepresented in the medical profession relative to their numbers in the general population” (para. 3). While the healthcare field is intentional in defining (under)representation in relation to the general population, this might not mirror trends in all higher education settings, where some institutions might use the term *URM* to reflect histories/legacies of oppression in relation to White supremacy and racism.

At ACHE, race/ethnicity data are collected from students via the admissions process using federal prompts: “Indicate whether you consider yourself to be of Hispanic or Latino origin,” “Select one or more of the groups of which you consider yourself to be a member” (AACOM, n.d.). Upon matriculation, ACHE students may update these designations at any time during their educational journey. IR later codes these self-reported data as URM or non-URM, coding that is further complicated by conflicting definitions of URM by the various external agencies the institution is required to report to. For instance, some programmatic reporting agencies (e.g., AACOM) define TOMR as non-URM, regardless of ethnic and racial composition. Thus, IR offices and admissions teams work collaboratively to operationalize how to identify and categorize multiracial students according to differing agency guidelines. At ARCOM, in academic year 2021–2022 students were categorized according to the method illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Previous (Academic Year 2021–2022) and Current Classification Method

Race/Ethnicity	Previous <i>N</i>	Current <i>N</i>
White	435	435
Hispanic/Latinx (Ethnicity: counted as URM no matter the race indicated)	45	45
Asian	200	200
American Indian/Alaska Native	5	5
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	5	5
Black/African American	35	35
Race/Ethnicity Not Reported	25	25
TOMR (non-URM)	50	15
TOMR (URM)	–	35
Total	800	800
URM (includes Hispanic/Latinx; American Indian/Alaska Native; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander; Black/African American)	90	125

Note: All numbers are examples only, and do not depict actual ARCOM enrollment data.

Using the previous system, a student who selected both *American Indian/Alaska Native* and *Black/African American* was reported in the catchall TOMR category, leading to an undercount of URM ($n = 90$). The healthcare/osteopathic professions value identifying health disparities by contextualizing the racial/ethnic representation of medical students in relation to the general population. Thus, a revision was required at ACHE to accurately depict those who are both multiracial and URM, resulting in a new TOMR (URM) reporting category in alignment with AACOM's definitions. This modification was established via ACHE's IR ad hoc committee to maintain accreditation requirements for AACOM. Table 2 also outlines the updated approach. In this revised method, only those who self-report as both White and Asian are placed into the TOMR (non-URM) category. Other racial combinations (e.g., Black and Asian) are placed into the TOMR (URM) category. The goal of this categorization is to more accurately capture students who are URM without excluding those who self-reported multiple racial categories.

The example in Table 3 highlights two fictitious students who identified as multiracial (or, more accurately, who selected multiple racial categories) and were previously reported in the TOMR category. Thus, LaDonna Jones and Maggie Nguyen were not analytically distinct under ACHE's prior guidelines. This is problematic because the life experiences with racism and settler colonialism between these two students are assumed to differ greatly. Further problematizing this issue is limited student-facing transparency around how their data will be aggregated into broader categories like TOMR or URM. Statistics on ethnicity and race are used for important purposes, such as for assessing health disparities, educational inequities, employment discrimination, and civil rights protections, as well as directing resources to ameliorate the underrepresentation of specific communities within medical professions. Accordingly, IR at ACHE was limited in providing decision-making guidance that was both relevant to medical fields and reflective of the nuanced diversity among its student population without updating its approach to URM categorization.

Table 3. Comparing Students Categorized as Two or More Races in Previous vs. Current Classification Methods

Student (pseudonyms)	Self-Reported Racial Categories	Previous Classification	Current Classification
LaDonna Jones	Black, American Indian	TOMR	TOMR (URM)
Maggie Nguyen	White, Asian	TOMR	TOMR (non-URM)

Note: These are not actual students but are fictitious examples used in the context of this article.

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

To operationalize our framework for disrupting quantitative monoracism in IR (see Figure 1), we offer a series of guiding questions (see Table 1) as a starting point for IR professionals to reflect on and revise practices that privilege a monoracial paradigm of race (Harris, 2016). The questions we pose are not an exhaustive list nor do we prescribe simple solutions. Rather, we hope to spark more questions than answers—to rupture rigid racial categories and create space for more-expansive understandings of multiraciality and monoracism in and through IR. Additionally, we acknowledge that some guiding questions could be more (or less) relevant to a given IR task or team. As such, we highlight a few generative questions rooted in our framework that deepen our engagement with the case study presented above and undergird practical recommendations for disrupting quantitative monoracism at (and likely beyond) our institution of focus. We also demonstrate how the guiding questions can be used in combination or across contexts in alignment with the framework's overlapping circles (see Figure 1).

Aligning Data Collection Practices with Intended Uses and Increasing Visibility

Here, we engage two guiding questions from our proposed framework: “Are questions about race aligned with the intended use(s) of data?” (Data Collection), and “In what ways are our (re)categorization practices made visible?” (Transparency). Although various reporting agencies provide guidelines for collecting racial and ethnic

demographic data in higher education, most are minimum standards and our questions and categories can be tailored to our specific institutional contexts. Moreover, we continue to encourage IR professionals to further consider how questions are asked and ways we can increase transparency at the time of data collection. For instance, the two hypothetical students presented above might identify differently based on how the race question is asked (Johnston et al., 2014). Tweaking the race question to “What racial category/categories best represent your lived experience?” might align more with intended uses of racial classifications to represent lived realities with racism and settler colonialism, rather than solely with group membership (although we acknowledge how group membership might be particularly relevant to American Indian/Alaska Native populations and tribal sovereignty).

Additionally, we encourage adding more visibility to racial re-categorization practices (e.g., URM) upfront at the data collection stage. Including footnotes or explanations within the admissions application can give students greater context about the uses (and transformations) of their data and increase their agency to make informed decisions related to the selection of racial categories. Racial categories, alone or in combination, do not signal singular, standardized, static meanings, nor are they operationalized consistently across contexts. As such, IR professionals must be explicit about their role in defining who is (or is not) counted, and how they are (re)categorized.

Using External Reporting to Disrupt Monoracist Practices and Increase Transparency

Next, we engage the following questions from our framework: “Does (dis)aggregation essentialize or expand racial categories?” (External Reporting), and “In what ways are our (re)categorization practices made visible?” (Transparency). As demonstrated by the ARCOM/ACHE example, IR professionals engage in racial re-formation (Campbell-Montalvo, 2019) when assigning students to URM/non-URM categories. However, the meaning(s) of these aggregate groupings are fluid and contextual. When AACOM revised its definition of URiM, ACHE followed suit and expanded its campus definition of URM beyond a monoracial paradigm of race (Harris, 2016). While this resulted in a multiracial-inclusive URM definition at ACHE (categorical expansion rather than essentialization), one might argue that the impetus was compliance with an external reporting agency and that recognition of multiraciality served an institutional interest (Harris, 2016). Even so, this example highlights the role that external reporting agencies (e.g., AACOM) can play in catalyzing shifts away from monoracist practices at the institutional level.

We recommend that ACHE, and institutions more broadly, increase transparency around the forces that drive racial re-formation within their campus context. For example, the University of Hawai‘i system publishes an online summary of the various ways race/ethnicity data are (re)coded in relation to external reporting bodies (see University of Hawai‘i, 2009). In the case of ACHE, such documentation should also include historical context (e.g., prior to the 2022–2023 academic year, no students categorized as TOMR were considered URM). Furthermore, we push for this documentation to be

easily accessible on IR websites and included as a footnote in reports and analyses, as applicable.

Clarifying Internal Analysis Procedures toward Anti-Monoracist Actions

Finally, we critically reflect on the following guiding questions: “How is race defined/contextualized at the campus level?” (Internal Analysis), and “What are the material impacts of anti-monoracist data collection/analysis?” (Action). The ARCOM case outlined how internal analysis can align directly with what is requested for external reporting agencies, in this case for AACOM. We recommend that IR professionals continue to further contextualize their definitions of racial categories, particularly aggregated categories. The definition and usage of URiM (not just URM) demonstrates this contextualization within the field of medicine (and healthcare more broadly) and how updated definitions can become more inclusive of multiraciality. A college of education might use this example to define URM in the education context to include Asian Americans, who are underrepresented in the teaching profession (Kim & Cooc, 2020). Furthermore, we encourage contextualization that includes historical and ongoing legacies of racial exclusion/oppression that can further understanding of underrepresentation as an active and ongoing process, rather than as just a static calculation of current proportionality, and why spotlighting such aggregated groups can help disrupt White normative representations in higher education. Additionally, we encourage IR professionals to further disaggregate large racial groupings as we understand the diversity within groups and how specific subpopulations might be underrepresented within different contexts. In areas with large populations of specific multiracial groups

(e.g., mixed Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans in Hawai'i), there could be further contextualization of how specific multiracial groups should be classified when defining underrepresentation.

Moreover, these institutionally contextualized and nuanced racial categorizations can have material impacts toward disrupting monoracist practices on campus. For ARCOM, now that there is a distinct TOMR (URM) categorization, comparisons can be made regarding several important experiential and outcome variables for this grouping, particularly in comparison to the TOMR (non-URM) students. These analyses could demonstrate the need for more-intentional support services, inclusion in the curriculum, and outreach efforts for different multiracial populations, which would impact how resources are allocated.

LIMITATIONS

While we introduce a framework and associated guiding questions to prompt discussion and disruption of quantitative monoracism in IR, we also acknowledge the inherent limitations in approaches to systemic and institutional change that rely solely on reflection and action at the individual level. At present, TOMR is a required reporting category that is tied to material resources (e.g., federal funding). To simply abandon its use is neither practical nor purposeful. Within an IR ecosystem that some could argue fosters a culture of compliance with campus, state, and federal mandates, we ask, "How can IR professionals most effectively and sustainably exert agency to disrupt monoracism within their spheres of influence?" For example, an IR professional might not have the positional power to amend the categories used to collect race data in the admissions process. However,

they can be clear about the limits of these data and clearly articulate the choices they make when analyzing race data (e.g., aggregation, exclusion). A university might not have the budgetary agility to quickly overhaul campus data systems, but IR professionals can foster productive relationships and test incremental changes to build buy-in around proposed changes. IR professionals alone cannot eradicate quantitative monoracism, but they can model multiracial-inclusive practices and advocate for policies that support anti-monoracist approaches to quantitative research. We position our guiding questions as conversation starters rather than as problem solvers. It is our hope that these questions spark critical dialogue within IR spaces that, alongside broader efforts to (re)shape the systems and structures that privilege monoracial categories, will move the IR field toward more-expansive and more-innovative analyses of race data.

CONCLUSION

Our framework and examples like the above case study provide convincing reasons to critically examine the policies, practices, and processes that elevate and essentialize discrete racial categories in IR contexts. We assert that the existence of "select all that apply" race data collection and a TOMR reporting category do not inherently disrupt quantitative monoracism. Rather, IR professionals exercise agency in translating and transforming these data to serve institutional needs and priorities. Failure to acknowledge the subjective, contextual nature of race data perpetuates false notions of neutrality in quantitative research (Gillborn et al., 2018), and strict adherence to rigid racial categories masks multiracial realities (Harris, 2016). As such, we offer guiding questions and illustrate their application in hopes of amplifying anti-monoracist action in IR.

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