

What is QuantCrit and What is it doing in a Nice Field Like Social Work? A Framework for Social Work Research

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Abstract: *This paper presents a framework for integrating QuantCrit into social work research. Quantitative research has long been critiqued for its role in reinforcing racial inequities, yet its historical foundations remain largely unquestioned in social work scholarship. This paper provides an overview of QuantCrit as a framework to examine the limitations of traditional quantitative methods and advocate for a reimagined approach that aligns with social work's commitment to equity and justice. We argue that without a critical framework, quantitative research risks perpetuating racial disparities by masking structural inequities, reinforcing deficit-based narratives, and legitimizing decisions that sustain oppression. Drawing on QuantCrit's core tenets, we explore alternative methodologies that challenge positivist assumptions, prioritize community-driven knowledge, and contextualize data within broader systems of power. We discuss implications of QuantCrit for social work research, education, and practice, emphasizing the need for scholars to engage with quantitative methods that expose, rather than obscure, racial injustice. By integrating QuantCrit into social work, we can actively interrogate and challenge the systemic factors that produce social injustice.*

Keywords: *Social work research, QuantCrit, critical race theory, quantitative research, statistics*

Social justice is integral to the social work profession, serving as a foundational element of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021) *Code of Ethics*. This commitment is evident in numerous initiatives and professional organizations. For instance, the Grand Challenges of Social Work target issues such as white supremacy and racism within and beyond the discipline (Fong et al., 2017; Lea et al., 2022). Additionally, the Society for Social Work and Research's emphasis on Social Work Science for Racial, Social, and Political Justice underscores the profession's dedication to utilizing scientific inquiry to combat racism, poverty, and economic inequality, which are issues that disproportionately affect marginalized individuals and communities (Fong et al., 2017). The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2022) similarly requires the integration of antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion content into social work curricula. A 2023 editorial in *Social Work Research* further highlights the responsibility of social work scholars to address social injustices, particularly during periods of political instability, even if there is no guarantee of safety (Hawkins, 2023). Social work research plays a crucial role in enhancing practice and advancing social justice (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). However,

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despite increased attention to racial and social justice, the application of social justice and equity frameworks within social work research methodology, especially in quantitative research, remains limited (Lauve-Moon et al., 2023).

“Social work is a profession, not a ‘basic science’ that engages in the development of knowledge for its own sake” (Anastas, 2014, p. 571). Social work research emerged in the late 1800s with studies focused on urban poverty and living conditions, rooted in the charity organization movement. Early efforts included measuring the prevalence of poverty, developing quantitative indexes to assess social services, and studying the multi-problem family (Zimbalist, 1977). The primary aim of this research was to inform agencies and practitioners in addressing client needs (Anastas, 2014). However, by the 1960s, the profession began to adopt positivist or logical empiricist approaches, aligning with broader social science research norms. This shift elevated experimental methods while marginalizing qualitative and hypothesis-generating approaches, which were only considered legitimate if they laid the groundwork for later empirical studies (Anastas, 2014). While this scientific framing supported the professionalization of social work, it often failed to serve the nuanced demands of practice. As Göppner (2012) notes, “research from one direction can be fruitful for the other” (p. 546), suggesting the need for methodological pluralism that bridges scientific rigor with practical relevance.

To reconcile these tensions between research paradigms and professional commitments, it is essential to revisit how the profession defines itself. In July of 2014, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW; 2014) defined

...social work as a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and Indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (para. 1)

Similarly, in 2021 the NASW (2021) restated this pronouncement by indicating that

...a historic and defining feature of social work is the profession’s dual focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is the attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute, and address problems in living. (p. 1)

Critics argue that political shifts and professionalization have led the profession from its social justice mission (Kam, 2014). Specht and Courtney (1995) notably describe some social workers as “unfaithful angels” for abandoning their commitment to combating inequity. Göppner (2012) emphasizes the importance of embracing a variety of positions, including positivism and social constructivism, to create change models that address power dynamics and social injustices. As a profession that explicitly values social justice, integrity, service, human relationships, the dignity and worth of every person, and competence (NASW, 2021), social work aligns well with CRT and its related critical

frameworks (Daftary, 2020). QuantCrit offers a pathway to integrate these values into research and practice.

Nevertheless, critical approaches grounded in feminist, decolonizing, and antiracist perspectives are increasingly shaping social work literature and providing frameworks for rigorous critique (Jackson et al., 2023; Maglalang et al., 2021; Ortega-Williams & McLane-Davison, 2021). These approaches prioritize lived experience, structural analysis, and community-centered practices. For example, *Affilia: Feminist Inquiry in Social Work* publishes scholarship focused on contemporary feminisms, which are, “grounded in critical, intersectional analysis of lived experiences of individuals and groups located in the context of complex structures, systems, and discourses of power and privilege” (Sage, 2024, para. 3). Similarly, Critical Race Theory (CRT) resonates with social work’s core values because it foregrounds equity and justice while emphasizing that racism is a normal and enduring feature of U.S. society, centering on the role of law, policy, and power in shaping racial inequities (Daftary, 2020). In alignment with these critical perspectives, QuantCrit, a framework that extends Critical Race Theory into quantitative research, recognizes the historical role of statistical analysis in perpetuating eugenics and scientific racism (Castillo & Strunk, 2025). QuantCrit informs research design and methodology through reflection on researcher positionality, which refers to the ways a researcher’s social identities, experiences, and location within systems of power shape their approach to knowledge creation and interpretation, is relative to the research topic and interpretation of results (Garcia et al., 2018; Hernández, 2015; Jackson et al., 2023). By employing QuantCrit, social work researchers can better align their methodological choices with the profession’s commitment to racial and social justice, ensuring that quantitative research supports equity rather than sustaining oppression (Campbell, 2017).

Interrogating the Foundations of Quantitative Social Work Research

Quantitative analysis remains essential for understanding and addressing social issues in the United States. Survey design, pilot studies, and statistical modeling are vital to developing and evaluating social work interventions, with randomized controlled trials widely regarded as the gold standard in the field (NASW, 2025). Social work, rooted in advancing social justice, advocates for social change alongside its helping roles (NASW, 2021). However, the historical relationship between statistics and racism is seldom acknowledged in the social work literature (Fook, 2022; Sablan, 2019). Eugenicists, including Galton, Pearson, and Fisher, developed foundational statistical methods to advance pseudoscientific theories (Castillo & Strunk, 2025; Zuberi, 2001). Researchers must critically assess how these methods may perpetuate structural inequalities. Although randomization and statistical controls are believed to minimize bias and enhance rigor, they often ignore systemic inequities embedded in treatment programs, policies, and environments. Using race as a predictor can reinforce the conception of race as biological, rather than a social construct (Castillo & Babb, 2024; Garcia et al., 2018; Roth et al., 2023). Such assumptions reinforce erroneous understandings of racial difference (Castillo & Babb, 2024; Garcia et al., 2018; Roth et al., 2023). QuantCrit encourages researchers to scrutinize the supposed neutrality of statistical methods, which often overlook power dynamics and reinforce existing social hierarchies (Castillo & Babb, 2024). Quantitative

social work research can neglect the complexities of social realities, obscure power dynamics, and ignore structural inequalities - limitations largely rooted in positivist traditions (Fook, 2022). With its emphasis on objectivity and generalizability, positivism favors an experimental design with the goal of replicability. Although this focus has value in some scientific contexts, it can clash with social work's commitment and the profession's emphasis on advocating for social change, particularly regarding areas of racial and economic inequity (Park et al., 2020; Swigonski, 1994). Rather than abandoning traditional quantitative approaches, QuantCrit advocates for a more reflective and critical application of these methods.

This emphasis on social justice, systemic awareness, and collective responsibility underscores the need for research approaches that align with these values. While generalizable knowledge is important for informing policy and practice, the profession's reluctance to label itself as "science" (Anastas, 2014; Brekke, 2012; LeCroy Kaplin, 2022; Munté-Pascual et al., 2024) may reflect a deeper discomfort with research paradigms that prioritize objectivity over context, and the replicability over responsiveness to lived experience. This tension invites a critical reflection on how social work research can evolve to better honor the profession's commitments by embracing methodologies that are inclusive to complexity, attuned to power dynamics, and rooted in the pursuit of equity.

Social work research aims to address the historical, systemic, and environmental factors contributing to marginalization. Yet, efforts to address systemic oppression are constrained by entrenched positivist philosophies, which assume science can produce objective, value-free knowledge, and focus on causal prediction and control (Park et al., 2020). In response, this article pursues three objectives: (1) introducing the principles of QuantCrit; (2) articulating how QuantCrit principles correspond with social work values and ethics; and (3) advocating for the integration of QuantCrit in social work research to transform prevailing paradigms and counter these norms.

Positionality of Authors

Our approach to QuantCrit is informed, motivated, and affected by our own identities and social positionality, as well as our experience with the social work profession and research. As discussed later, one key practice to implement from QuantCrit includes positionality statements (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022).

Author 1: My personal experience growing up as a system-involved youth informs my understanding of what it means to be a racialized person who holds visible and invisible marginalized identities. My racial, sexual, and gender identities are complex, often leading me to check the "other" box on demographic forms, aware that my responses will likely be excluded from analysis and instead "removed due to small sample size." Mostly due to undiagnosed dyscalculia and other learning disabilities, which provided enough evidence for me to believe I would never be "good at math," I avoided dealing with numbers whenever possible until receiving professional diagnoses and accommodations as a doctoral student. I had already come to CRT as an undergraduate political science major, and it was during my PhD program that I learned of QuantCrit, which provided a framework for using statistical methods in a way that made sense to me. Today, I am faculty

in a College of Education and Human Development, where questions regarding how to best use quantitative research for equity are being asked.

Author 2 is a cisgender Black gay man with North American heritage. His background includes being U.S.-born, African American, cisgender, male, and gay, which informs his research on diverse Black sexual minority men (such as gay, bisexual, queer, and/or same-gender loving-identified individuals), or “Black SMM” (sexual minority men). In social work and public health scholarship, Black SMM refers to Black men who are attracted to or have sex with people of the same gender. The term encompasses diverse identities, including gay, bisexual, and queer men, as well as those who have same-sex experiences but may not use strict Eurocentric labels (Malebranche, 2020). The author's demographic history includes growing up in a mid-sized Midwestern city, with divorced parents and a strong network of extended family throughout the U.S. Midwest. He attended public K-12 schools and earned undergraduate and advanced degrees from both public and private higher education institutions, holding a Bachelor of Arts (BA), Master of Social Work (MSW), and Doctorate (PhD) in Social Work.

Today, as a scholar specializing in Black SMM populations and behavioral, psychological, and sexual health, QuantCrit offers a framework for research focused on this population, a subgroup of minoritized individuals whose lived experiences are often underrepresented in traditional quantitative scholarship. Specifically, “men who have sex with men” (“MSM”) refers exclusively to behavior, describing men who have sex with men regardless of their sexual orientation, identity, or how they label themselves. “SMM,” by contrast, is a broader umbrella term that refers to identity and orientation and describes men whose sexual identity, attraction, or orientation differs from the heterosexual majority, including gay, bisexual, queer, and pansexual men. While MSM is precise for clinical surveillance, critics argue that the term reduces individuals to their sexual behavior and overlooks broader mental health, social support, and community needs. SMM is increasingly used in clinical settings to honor self-identification, promote more respectful communication, and account for the psychosocial pressures (such as “minority stress”) faced by sexual minorities. While these categories facilitate large-scale quantitative research, they may also obscure the complexities of Black gay identities and the combined effects of anti-Black racism and homophobia, potentially leading to gaps between social work and public health approaches and the actual experiences and needs of the community (Keene, 2026). As a researcher who employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to advance knowledge, particularly concerning marginalized populations such as Black gay-identified men, I consider QuantCrit to be an effective framework. This approach offers enhanced potential to improve representation of marginalized groups by integrating principles including valuing narrative, acknowledging that data are not neutral, and centering non-whiteness throughout the research process. Such practices foster health equity and address systemic inequities.

Author 3: I am a White cisgender male, who approaches this work from experience as a youth worker and school-based social worker, seeing various forms of oppression play out through school systems. Though my parents directed my attention early on to socioeconomic differences, it was only when I attended larger private undergraduate and graduate institutions with greater racial and ethnic diversity that I began to more fully

recognize and critically reflect on the ways systemic racism and other forms of social inequality shape individuals' experiences and opportunities. Those experiences exposed me to a broader set of social justice issues, especially racial injustice. In my graduate education, my program emphasized training educational researchers to use quantitative methods. As such training did not emphasize reflexivity, I have thus far found QuantCrit to be a crucial bridge between quantitative methods and social work's emphasis on critical theory and social justice. This reflexivity includes working to remain aware of how my whiteness, cisgendered maleness, socioeconomic and other forms of privilege affect my research questions, choice of theories, methods and interpretations.

Author 4: My interest in QuantCrit stems from my lived experience as a mixed-race Native and White cis-gender, heterosexual, able-bodied female from a middle-class Mormon family in Northern Virginia. My mother is White (English/Irish), and my father is an enrolled member of the Seneca Nation. Growing up, I often struggled to know where I fit—racially, phenotypically, culturally, and religiously. As a K–12 school social worker and mixed methods scholar, I witnessed similar identity complexities among students, particularly in how these shaped their sense of belonging and engagement in school.

During my doctoral studies, I frequently encountered the assertion that researching Native students was inherently difficult due to their small representation in datasets. While I understand that statistical methods often require large sample sizes to ensure validity and generalizability, I also recognize how this framing has historically led to the erasure or dismissal of Native populations in social work and education research. This exclusion is not merely a methodological issue, it is a political one, with real consequences for how Native students are seen, supported, and served.

QuantCrit offers a powerful framework to challenge these limitations by integrating critical theory with quantitative methods. It invites us to question whose data "counts," how we define significance, and what stories are left untold when we privilege size over substance. Through this lens, I aim to advocate for more inclusive and equity-centered approaches to social work educational research and policy, especially those that affirm Native students' experiences of belonging and engagement.

As social work scholars committed to equity and justice, QuantCrit offers a vital framework that bridges our lived experiences with our methodological choices. Our positionality statements reflect the way in which race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other intersecting identities shape our perspectives and research priorities. QuantCrit, as articulated by Gillborn, Warmington, and others (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022; Gillborn et al., 2018), challenges the presumed neutrality of data and calls attention to how quantitative methods can reproduce systemic inequities. Principles such as the non-neutrality of data, the socially constructed nature of categories, and the potential for numbers to camouflage oppression (Gillborn et al., 2018) resonate deeply with our experiences of exclusion, erasure, and misrepresentation in traditional research paradigms. For example, the frequent dismissal of small sample sizes in studies involving Native students or Black sexual minority men reflects how statistical conventions can marginalize entire communities. QuantCrit invites us to interrogate these conventions and instead center critical reflexivity, counter-storytelling, and equity focused analysis – which are principles that align with

social work's ethical mandate to challenge injustice and promote human dignity. By embracing QuantCrit, we are not only refining our methodological rigor but also affirming our responsibility to produce research that is inclusive, transformative, and accountable to the communities we serve.

Critical Race Theory and QuantCrit

QuantCrit has its foundation in CRT and examines the persistent effects of colonization, racial capitalism, and systemic oppression within the United States (Garcia et al., 2018). Importantly, CRT emerged from the legal field to address racial identity and educational access (Crenshaw, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). CRT sought to rectify the lack of acknowledgement of historical harm resulting in present-day disparities in discussions of social inequality and oppression through an evolving set of assumptions (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Core tenets of CRT include viewing race as a social construct, recognizing the ordinariness of racism in society, critiquing liberalism and meritocracy, and positing that reforms occur only when they benefit racial-majority groups. CRT also emphasizes experiential knowledge, centering on the lived experiences of those not included in dominant narratives. It also highlights how inequality intersects with other dimensions of identity (López et al., 2018).

CRT has been used in various disciplines, including law, communications, education, and public health (Bell, 1995; Carbado & Roithmayr, 2014; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Hodge & Chávez, 2025). Several critical theories have evolved from CRT, including DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013), LatCrit (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005), and AsianCrit (Museus & Ifikar, 2013), some of which have been applied to social work scholarship (Azhar et al., 2022; Gutiérrez & Lechuga-Peña, 2022; Samimi et al., 2023). Social work researchers can utilize CRT to recognize the power and privilege embedded in social work teaching, research, and practice, focus on anti-racism through a critique of whiteness, and legitimize racial justice scholarship (Kolivoski et al., 2014).

QuantCrit expands CRT principles into quantitative research. It challenges the assumption that methods are neutral, recognizing that data collection, construction, and analysis reflect power structures. QuantCrit is structured around five key tenets: 1) the centrality of racism (Crawford et al., 2018); 2) numbers are not neutral (Crawford et al., 2018; López et al., 2018); 3) categories are neither natural nor inherent (Gillborn et al., 2018); 4) data cannot speak for themselves (Crawford et al., 2018) and 5) research is political and must orient toward social justice (Gillborn et al., 2018). Some scholars also discuss a sixth tenet, valuing narrative and counternarrative, which challenges the dominant explanations of inequality by centering the stories and perspectives of systematically silenced and marginalized communities (Van Dusen & Nissen, 2021).

QuantCrit requires acknowledgement that racial categories are not biologically real but instead reflect the ways in which structures shape social experiences (Gillborn et al., 2018). This challenges the notion that numbers are neutral or objective, asserting that statistical analyses must be interpreted within their broader social, political, and historical contexts. Without such critical engagement, quantitative research risks reinforcing harmful stereotypes and neglecting the complexity of social issues. Quant Crit also compels social

work scholars to explicitly orient their research toward social justice, recognizing that data not only informs interventions, but also that the broader social and political conditions shape outcomes for systemically marginalized groups. As Sablan (2019) points out, “social science research on the whole is regarded by some as not fully equipped to reflect oppressed communities,” (p. 181). Furthermore, a researcher’s intentionality in choosing methods is more critical in addressing inequality than the specific methods employed (Carter & Hurtado, 2007; Sablan, 2019). By applying QuantCrit, social work scholars can critically leverage anti-oppressive approaches for quantitative analysis through a critical, race-conscious paradigm, offering a potential way forward for social work research.

Table 1. *Core Tenets of QuantCrit and Their Implications for Quantitative Research*

QuantCrit Tenet	Description	Implication for Quantitative Research
Racism is ordinary	Racism is deeply embedded in social structures; not an exception but the norm.	Analyses should assume racism is systemic rather than treating disparities as anomalies.
All scholarship is political	Knowledge production reflects power relations and interests.	Researchers must be transparent about positionality and the political stakes of their work.
Numbers aren’t neutral	Data, categories, and measures are socially constructed and reflect bias.	Interrogate variable construction, measurement, and the framing of deficit narratives.
Data cannot speak for themselves	Categories and outcomes are not “natural;” interpretation requires context and lived experience.	Pair data with counter-narratives and experiential knowledge from marginalized groups.
Voice and counter-storytelling	Marginalized perspectives are vital for revealing hidden patterns of injustice.	Incorporate qualitative voices and critically center the knowledge of communities of color.
Intersectional perspective	Oppressions are interconnected; analysis must capture complexity across race, gender, class, etc.	Use methods that highlight intersections and avoid flattening identities.
Social justice orientation	Research should aim for equity and transformation, not neutrality.	Apply quantitative tools toward revealing inequities and supporting change.

Table 1 synthesizes key concepts from QuantCrit scholarship (Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013; Crawford et al., 2018; Gillborn et al., 2018; López et al., 2018; Van Dusen & Nissen, 2021) and foundational CRT scholarship (Bell, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Yosso, 2005) and summarizes how QuantCrit reframes quantitative research. These principles, grounded in critical race theory, emphasize that data and methods are not neutral but embedded in power relations. By highlighting the political nature of scholarship, the social construction of categories, and the necessity of centering marginalized voices, QuantCrit provides a framework for using quantitative methods in the service of equity and justice. QuantCrit allows researchers to engage with quantitative data while considering the social context, power dynamics, and historical contexts that influence social

phenomena. It offers a nuanced and justice-oriented approach to quantitative inquiry. QuantCrit can be applied to social work research to develop a quantitative framework that is explicitly committed to social justice, antiracism, and equity. Building on this potential, the following section presents a framework for using QuantCrit in social work research.

Applying QuantCrit to Social Work Research

QuantCrit extends CRT into quantitative research, challenging assumptions of data neutrality and objectivity (Garcia et al., 2018). Although conventional quantitative methodologies emphasize objectivity, generalizability, and replicability, QuantCrit interrogates how power, systemic oppression, and historical inequities shape data practices. QuantCrit acknowledges the assumptions of traditional statistical models that claim the independence of variables, race-neutral causality, and universality of findings by confronting how these assumptions mask structural inequalities. Rather than treating disparities as statistical anomalies, QuantCrit frames them as evidence of injustice, which requires intervention.

A justice-oriented approach in quantitative research requires social work scholars to interrogate the biases embedded in research design, data collection, and analysis, rather than passively reproduce inequitable social structures. QuantCrit allows quantitative research to be used as a tool for advocacy, accountability, and transformation, by moving beyond simply documenting disparities. It critiques how inequities are embedded in data practices themselves. Standardized racial classifications, missing data patterns, and model assumptions often reflect racialized histories of exclusion and bias (Gillborn et al., 2018). Social work researchers can use QuantCrit to:

- Unmask how systemic oppression produces statistical disparities, shifting from an individual-level focus to a structural analysis.
- Develop methodological strategies that resist framing communities in terms of what they lack, and instead emphasize historical, economic, and policy-driven explanations for social outcomes.
- Leverage quantitative data to support community-led advocacy, rather than producing research that merely describes inequality without proposing action.

Although QuantCrit methodology in the social work literature is nascent, social work scholars have applied critical quantitative approaches in examining educational disparities, disaggregating categories and interpreting findings through structural analysis rather than individual, deficit-based frames (Joseph-McCatty et al., 2024; Samimi et al., 2023). This work demonstrates how QuantCrit can meaningfully inform empirical research in social work-adjacent domains, reinforcing its utility for our discipline. Embracing QuantCrit allows social work researchers to transform quantitative research into an instrument of antiracist inquiry, ensuring that statistical methods align with the profession's mandate to promote justice and challenge systemic oppression.

Research Design and Question Formation

A critical aspect of social work research is the framing of research questions to interrogate the structural and systemic causes of inequities rather than focusing on individual deficits. For example, a traditional approach might ask why Black children experience higher rates of school discipline, whereas a QuantCrit perspective reframes the inquiry to explore how school discipline policies contribute to racial disparities in exclusionary discipline (Anyon et al., 2023; Cruz et al., 2021). This shift is more than semantic; it places institutional racism and social structures at the center of critical inquiry throughout the research process, including question formation, design, analysis, and interpretation (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022). Language also plays a crucial role in this reframing. For instance, describing students as ‘pushed out’ rather than ‘dropped out’ more accurately conveys the systemic forces influencing educational outcomes (Garcia et al., 2022). We have adapted examples from Samimi et al. (2023), Cruz et al. (2021), Covarrubias and Vélez (2013), and Yosso (2005) to further illustrate how QuantCrit reframes inquiry. Table 2 contrasts traditional quantitative research questions with QuantCrit-informed alternatives. Whereas conventional questions often locate problems within individuals or groups, a QuantCrit approach interrogates the policies, systems, and power relations that shape observed disparities.

Table 2. *Traditional and QuantCrit-Informed Research Questions*

Traditional Quantitative Question	QuantCrit-Informed Question
Do Black students underperform on standardized tests compared to White students?	How do systemic policies, school funding inequities, and biased testing practices shape the measured outcomes of Black students on standardized tests?
Why are Latinx youth more likely to experience school suspension?	How do disciplinary policies, surveillance practices, and racialized constructions of behavior contribute to the disproportionate suspension of Latinx youth?
What individual risk factors predict higher rates of foster care placement among Native children?	How do historical policies (e.g., child removal, boarding schools) and contemporary systemic inequities (e.g., poverty, jurisdictional gaps) produce disparities in foster care placement for Native children?
What protective factors predict resilience among LGBTQ+ youth of color?	How do community cultural wealth, mutual aid, and collective resistance strategies foster resilience among LGBTQ+ youth of color within oppressive contexts?

These examples highlight how QuantCrit reshapes the framing of inquiry - the same principles also guide subsequent stages of the research process, including data collection and measurement. In data collection, whether through surveys, interviews, or focus groups, a critical approach to question design is essential. Research questions should be shaped by the lived experiences of marginalized communities and designed to inform structural change. Rather than relying on deficit-based frameworks that attribute disparities to marginalized groups' characteristics, a QuantCrit approach shifts focus to institutional practices, policies, and historical contexts that create and sustain inequities. For example, research on racial disparities in child welfare placements must consider the enduring

impact of past policies (e.g., redlining, school segregation, and mass incarceration) on contemporary inequalities (Roberts, 2002).

Adapting Measures and Methods

QuantCrit requires a shift in both what we measure and how we analyze. Measures that usually reflect deficit framings or individual traits, such as resilience scales that focus on self-regulation or problem solving, should be adapted to highlight the collective strengths of communities, ensuring communities are represented in ways that resist deficit framing. For example, Castillo and Babb's 2023 systematic review found several studies where Quant-Crit informed measures were developed and added to preexisting instruments or created as new tools. These measures critically evaluated constructs as diverse as hiring processes, social justice teaching, and friendships (Castillo & Babb, 2024). Similarly, QuantCrit does not privilege one statistical technique: it is an adaptable framework and can apply across a diversity of statistical approaches. These include descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, hierarchical linear modeling, ANOVA, multiple regression, logistic regression, mixed effect modeling, structural equation modeling, Pearson's Chi-squared, inventory analysis, t-tests, and more (Young et al., 2025). In QuantCrit, it is in the interpretation and contextualization, subjective processes completed by researchers, where important application occurs (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022).

QuantCrit's major contributions lie in interpretation and context. For example, multilevel modeling can illuminate how school or neighborhood factors interact with race and class, while disaggregation prevents the erasure of within-group differences. Joseph-McCatty et al. (2024) illustrate these principles empirically, relying on a crucial quantitative lens to examine educational disparities with explicit focus on systemic inequities.

Ethical and Reflexive Data Collection

The politics of measurement is another area of scrutiny in QuantCrit research. Many standardized measures in social work research have been developed based on White, middle-class populations (Hill, 2009). A critical lens challenges whether constructs such as "resilience" or "family engagement" are measured in ways that reflect the realities of diverse communities (Hill, 2009). For example, a standardized resilience measure might emphasize individual traits, such as emotional regulation and problem solving, which may not consider community-based forms of resilience common in marginalized groups, such as community cultural wealth strategies or mutual aid (Carstensen et al., 2021; Yosso, 2005). Racial and ethnic categories like "Black," "Latine," or "Asian" often obscure within-group differences shaped by immigration history, economic status, and regional context. Therefore, QuantCrit-informed studies advocate for disaggregating data where possible and critically assessing how race is operationalized. This approach acknowledges that racial categorizations are not biological or inherent but socially constructed labels reflecting systems of oppression (Gillborn et al., 2018).

Conventional quantitative methods often contribute to the erasure of marginalized populations, as standard practices such as excluding groups with small sample sizes can remove important perspectives from analyses (Grant et al., 2022). Alternative strategies, such as disaggregating within-group data or conducting separate analyses for smaller groups, provide more nuanced insights into the root causes of disparities. For example, the term “Hispanic or Latino” fails to capture the diverse national origins, language fluencies, cultural practices, and life histories of individuals within these groups (Kauh et al., 2021). Similarly, the broad category “African American” does not account for the impacts of colorism and other within-group distinctions (Burton et al., 2010; Castillo & Gillborn, 2022; Hickman, 1996; Kauh et al., 2021). The same is true for disability classifications, which are socially constructed rather than objective or fixed categories, because historical processes have continuously reshaped their definitions (Hiranandani, 2005).

Beyond measurement, QuantCrit also critiques the history of extractive research in the social sciences, where marginalized communities have been treated as subjects rather than as active partners (Tuck, 2009). One approach for social work scholars is to embrace participatory action research (PAR) methods that involve community members in the study design, question formation, and data interpretation (Healy, 2001). For example, in studies on housing insecurity, researchers may collaborate with tenant advocacy organizations to ensure that data collection prioritizes tenants' needs. Additionally, the identities of the data collectors influence participant responses (Bourke, 2014). It is crucial to consider whether bilingual, culturally informed interviewers elicit more candid perspectives than White, English-speaking researchers.

Data Analysis: Beyond Traditional Statistical Assumptions

Numbers are not neutral, and traditional statistical methods often fail to account for racial biases embedded in data collection and interpretation (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022). A conventional regression analysis might show that Black families experience higher rates of child welfare involvement than White families. However, the QuantCrit approach interrogates the systemic factors contributing to these disparities, such as whether caseworkers disproportionately report Black families due to implicit bias or whether surveillance mechanisms, such as mandatory reporting policies in predominantly Black schools and neighborhoods, exacerbate these disparities more than actual differences in parenting practices.

The assumption that numbers are neutral must be challenged, as quantitative data are neither objective nor free of bias (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022). Instead, numerical findings are shaped by worldviews and belief systems, making claims of statistical neutrality, particularly in racialized contexts, misleading (López et al., 2018). Researchers must critically examine how their statistical choices influence the findings and shape interpretations of inequality (Gillborn et al., 2018). Data are frequently used by decision makers to categorize groups, justify funding allocations, and either support or dismantle social programs. Numbers can also be manipulated to obscure or normalize systemic inequalities (Gillborn et al., 2018).

Interpretation and Contextualization of Findings

Interpreting findings through a QuantCrit lens requires an explicit recognition of the social, political, and historical contexts that shape data outcomes. Statistical results do not exist in a vacuum; they must be analyzed within the broader landscape of structural inequities (Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013). For instance, when studies report disparities in mental health diagnoses between racial groups, a QuantCrit interpretation considers how provider bias, access to culturally competent care, socioeconomic barriers, and bias in measure development may influence these numbers, rather than assuming inherent group differences. Likewise, Anyon et al. (2023) examine racial disparities in in-school suspension rates not just with raw proportions, but by comparing rates relative to the size of racial groups; they utilize multilevel logistic regression and contextualize their findings within a history of racial out-of-school suspension to highlight limitations of race-neutral discipline policies.

The findings should be contextualized with qualitative insights and historical analysis to avoid reinforcing harmful narratives about marginalized communities (Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013). A key component of this process involves questioning who benefits from the dominant interpretation of the data. For example, if research suggests that Black students have lower standardized test scores, a structural analysis will highlight how educational segregation, underfunded schools, and biased testing methodologies contribute to these outcomes. By shifting the focus from individual or group deficits to systemic forces, QuantCrit-informed research ensures that the findings challenge rather than reinforce existing power structures.

Social work is uniquely positioned as an applied discipline that informs policy through research (Sherraden et al., 2002). Scholars have called for policy advocacy that employs critical approaches to challenge dominant narratives and advance equity (Dettlaff et al., 2020; Goodkind et al., 2021). QuantCrit provides a framework for using numerical data not only as descriptors of risk but also as tools for interrogating how numbers reinforce dominant ideologies and marginalize communities most affected by systemic oppression.

QuantCrit enhances social work research by integrating critical perspectives on power, inequality, and social justice using quantitative methods. By challenging the traditional notions of objectivity and neutrality, QuantCrit encourages researchers to consider the social, historical, and political contexts that shape data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This alignment with social work's commitment to social justice and equity allows for more nuanced insights into the experiences of marginalized communities. It also empowers social workers to address systemic inequities, ensuring that research not only measures disparities, but also informs interventions aimed at promoting equity and justice.

Implications for Social Work

Social work, as a profession committed to social justice, has engaged in critical dialogue about its theoretical foundations and research methodologies. This discourse positions social work scholars to contribute valuable insights into the ongoing development of QuantCrit. Additionally, social work research already includes approaches or practices

that may serve as models for other disciplines. Given these considerations, we propose the following actions for social work practitioners and scholars:

Actively Incorporate QuantCrit Principles and Practices into the Scholarship We Produce

Social work researchers must integrate QuantCrit principles into their scholarship, not only by employing QuantCrit methodologies but also by engaging in critical reflection on how quantitative practices align with social work values and ethics. When researchers adopt a positivist quantitative perspective without critical reflection, their results may lack depth and fail to capture the complexity of the social phenomena that we study (Curley, 2019; Sabzalian et al., 2021).

A key consideration is the disaggregation of data. An overreliance on aggregate data, such as using broad categories like “Asian” or “Latinx,” can obscure the varied challenges faced by subgroups within these categories (Bacong et al., 2020; Díaz & Díaz, 2022). Disaggregating data allows for a nuanced understanding of human experience and prevents oversimplification (Teranishi et al., 2020). This practice also facilitates a deeper exploration of intersectionality, acknowledging that people often identify with multiple overlapping categories such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. Methodological approaches to effectively disaggregate data may include the use of multilevel models that allow researchers to account for variations at different levels and demonstrate how community-level factors interact with individual-level characteristics (Suárez et al., 2021). Longitudinal studies can also provide insight into how disparities evolve over time (Okur, 2024). By disaggregating data, social work scholars can illustrate how intersecting identities shape experiences in social systems.

Additionally, quantitative social work research frequently relies on deficit-based metrics that highlight what communities lack rather than recognizing their existing assets (Zuberi, 2001). Metrics such as low test scores, high rates of health issues, or elevated unemployment often pathologize marginalized groups rather than recognizing their strengths and resources (Fitzgerald & Gallus, 2024; Lasater et al., 2021). QuantCrit advocates for strengths-based indicators informed by community insights and perspectives (Tabron & Thomas, 2023). One way to do this is to use frameworks that identify and document the resources, strengths, and capabilities of individuals and communities. These may include employing methods such as PAR or community asset mapping, and frameworks such as Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth. Frameworks such as these allow researchers to explore relationships between multiple forms of knowledge and intervention outcomes.

Finally, many studies correlate positive outcomes with increased resources or delivery of an intervention (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022). This approach to reporting often neglects contextual variables, such as economic conditions or policy changes, which can influence both the availability of resources and the prevalence of the problem. A QuantCrit approach integrates context into causal inference by examining the interactions between multiple factors, including systemic issues, rather than attributing outcomes to a single variable.

By implementing QuantCrit principles, social work researchers can enrich their quantitative analyses, ensuring that they reflect the complexities of social issues and advance social justice. This approach challenges traditional positivist methods, which can inadvertently reinforce systemic inequalities by emphasizing context, participant engagement, and critical reflection. Ultimately, incorporating QuantCrit not only enhances the validity and reliability of research findings but also aligns them closely with the core values of social work.

Incorporate QuantCrit into Our Curricula

Future generations of social workers and researchers will be better positioned to advance equity, social justice, and liberation if QuantCrit is intentionally integrated into social work education. This requires a comprehensive and strategic approach to ensure that students gain a deeper understanding of QuantCrit principles, methodologies, and applications. While different contexts demand different starting points and processes, several areas warrant consideration. These include resource allocation, such as funding QuantCrit-focused initiatives, research studies, guest lectures, community-engaged research projects, and programs aligned with QuantCrit principles. Developing instructional materials, including articles and case studies that employ QuantCrit approaches, can further ensure that students have access to opportunities and resources that provide a thorough grounding in QuantCrit methods and perspectives.

In developing the curriculum, QuantCrit may be integrated into existing courses, such as research methods and social policy, or introduced as a standalone methods course. A dedicated QuantCrit course may include methodological foundations and practical applications in social work research and practice while highlighting the interdisciplinary traditions that connect QuantCrit to broader social justice frameworks. Another important consideration is faculty training and buy-in. Providing professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and collaborative research projects, can increase faculty understanding of QuantCrit and its potential contributions to social work research and practice.

Incorporating QuantCrit into social work education requires thoughtful planning, collaboration, and commitment to support a variety of epistemologies. By embedding QuantCrit into social work education, social work programs can empower future practitioners to engage critically with quantitative research, advocate for marginalized communities, and contribute to a more just and equitable society.

Integrate Social Work Knowledge into a Broader QuantCrit Discourse

By engaging with existing literature and collaborating with experts across disciplines, social work scholars can contribute valuable perspectives that enrich this methodological framework. This engagement builds on a historical commitment to using data for equity and justice and requires a commitment to transforming systems. Although QuantCrit can be a powerful tool for anyone, its effective use requires a foundational understanding of its origins, purpose, and maintenance. Familiarity with the current scholarship on QuantCrit,

its lineage from critical race theory, and its possibilities for application are essential to its meaningful engagement (Tabron, 2024).

One critical step is establishing a supportive community where social work scholars can exchange ideas, refine methodologies, and navigate resistance to QuantCrit research. Given that work challenging dominant paradigms often faces scrutiny or resistance, mentorship and peer support are vital to sustaining efforts (Tabron, 2024). Engaging with scholars within social work and across disciplines not only broadens contextual understanding, but also enhances the depth and breadth of research, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the social issues at hand.

Additionally, social work's unique emphasis on systemic analysis contributes to QuantCrit's challenge to traditional quantitative methods. Social workers are trained to analyze social systems and structures, recognizing that disparities are often structurally produced rather than individual deficiencies. This perspective enables social workers to critically examine how data collection, variable selection, and interpretation can reflect and reinforce systemic injustice.

Integrating social work into the broader conversation of QuantCrit can help build a culture of equity in research. By challenging existing paradigms, while simultaneously developing inclusive spaces and equitable practices in research funding, publication, and access, social workers can contribute to a wider movement of justice within quantitative research. Ultimately, this collaboration not only enhances the validity and relevance of quantitative findings but also aligns research with the ethical imperatives of the social work profession. By embracing QuantCrit, social workers can leverage data as a powerful tool for social transformation, advocating for marginalized communities, and advancing social justice in meaningful ways.

Limitations and Challenges of QuantCrit

While QuantCrit provides a powerful framework for advancing equity in quantitative research, it is not without its challenges. Within positivist frames, race-conscious analyses are sometimes dismissed as lacking rigor. Additionally, access to disaggregated data can be limited, contributing to the erasure of marginalized groups. Contemporary attacks on critical race theory actively limit equity-focused scholarship. These realities do not weaken QuantCrit, but underscore the need for creative, collaborative, and persistent application of its principles in social work research.

Conclusion

Social work scholars can utilize QuantCrit as part of their ethical obligation to advance social justice. While all of the tenets of QuantCrit align with this obligation, the principle of ensuring a social justice orientation offers the greatest opportunity for social work to enhance the QuantCrit framework. The field of social work is uniquely positioned to engage populations and processes that are often excluded from research. Through an understanding of micro, mezzo, and macro interventions, social work scholars can disaggregate data and narrate stories that reflect all levels of social work practice.

Contextualizing quantitative data in this manner provides essential insights that link intervention impacts to the interlocking systems of oppression at the root of the issues our profession seeks to address (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023).

Social workers operate in diverse practice and research areas, including health and mental health, law, education, refugee and immigrant services, veteran social work, and many others. By applying the person-in-environment framework, social workers can expand QuantCrit as a framework that directly connects racialized and oppressed communities to research and policy advocacy, shifts power dynamics, and enhances interventions (Cashwell, 2024).

Centering historically marginalized voices remains central to social work practice and research, yet these voices have primarily been expressed through qualitative methods. QuantCrit provides a means for social work scholars to represent these narratives quantitatively. QuantCrit serves as a methodological framework with significant potential to refine and advance social work scholarship. It not only aligns with the social justice mandate of our profession but also bridges the dissonance between our values and the historical positivist orientation of quantitative methods. QuantCrit practices offer quantitative social work researchers a set of initial steps to align their work with critical social theory.

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