

What Did I Miss?

The hidden costs of deprioritizing diversity in user research



Who is involved?

provision
caring
families



Megan Campos

Experience Research Director
Mad*Pow

Dog tax.



Framing this talk.

- This is an open and ongoing conversation
- There is no single, perfect solution, nor should there be
- The focus today is on race, but diversity is far, far broader than that
- ~~"Underrepresented"~~ "Misrepresented"

What's going on?

When we ask for...

- A mix of gender
- A mix of race
- A mix of income

We get...

- All cis-gendered
- Mostly white
- Mostly middle or upper-middle economic class

Whether we like it or not, whether we see it or not,
our **individual demographic makeup** has an
impact on **how we experience the world**, and on
how the world experiences us.



lgbtq youth share their stories, offer advice to adults to end bullying

CLARE KENNY, DIRECTOR OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
OCTOBER 18, 2018



Respondents reported high levels of mistreatment, harassment, and violence in every aspect of life. One in ten (10%) of those who were out to their immediate family reported that a family member was violent towards them because they were transgender, and 8% were kicked out of the house because they were transgender.



BREAKING: The Idaho Senate just passed a bill targeting trans student athletes. This bill could subject any student athlete to invasive screenings.

Eight ways the world is not designed for women

By Ritu Prasad
BBC News

© 5 June 2019



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The biggest obstacle women face

Conventional wisdom says that women hit a "glass ceiling" as they advance that prevents them from reaching senior leadership positions. In reality, the biggest obstacle that women face is the first step up to manager, or the "broken rung." This broken rung results in more women getting stuck at the entry level and fewer women becoming managers. As a result, there are significantly fewer women to advance to higher levels. To get to gender parity across the entire pipeline, companies must fix the broken rung.

[LEARN HOW COMPANIES CAN FIX THE BROKEN RUNG >](#)



Personal Finance • Perspective

Shopping while black. African Americans continue to face retail racism.



I Was Pregnant and in Crisis. All the Doctors and Nurses Saw Was an Incompetent Black Woman



Getty Images

BY **TRESSIE MCMILLAN COTTOM** JANUARY 8, 2019
McMillan Cottom is the author of *Thick: And Other Essays* and is an assistant professor of sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Megan Rapinoe
@mPinoe
Equal Play. Equal Pay. RESPECT.



A recent example.

Doctors Are Concerned That Black Communities Might Not Be Getting Access To Coronavirus Tests

Approval for testing for COVID-19 is particularly vulnerable to implicit biases, doctors say.

“Right now, there’s that sentiment in the middle of a crisis that a rising tide will lift all boats, and we know that has never been true in America,” said Dr. Cameron Webb.

The doctors say that the deep-seated inequities that disproportionately affect black communities — like a lack of paid sick leave and adequate health insurance, income disparities, and access to medical facilities — can heighten the effects of a crisis like the coronavirus outbreak.

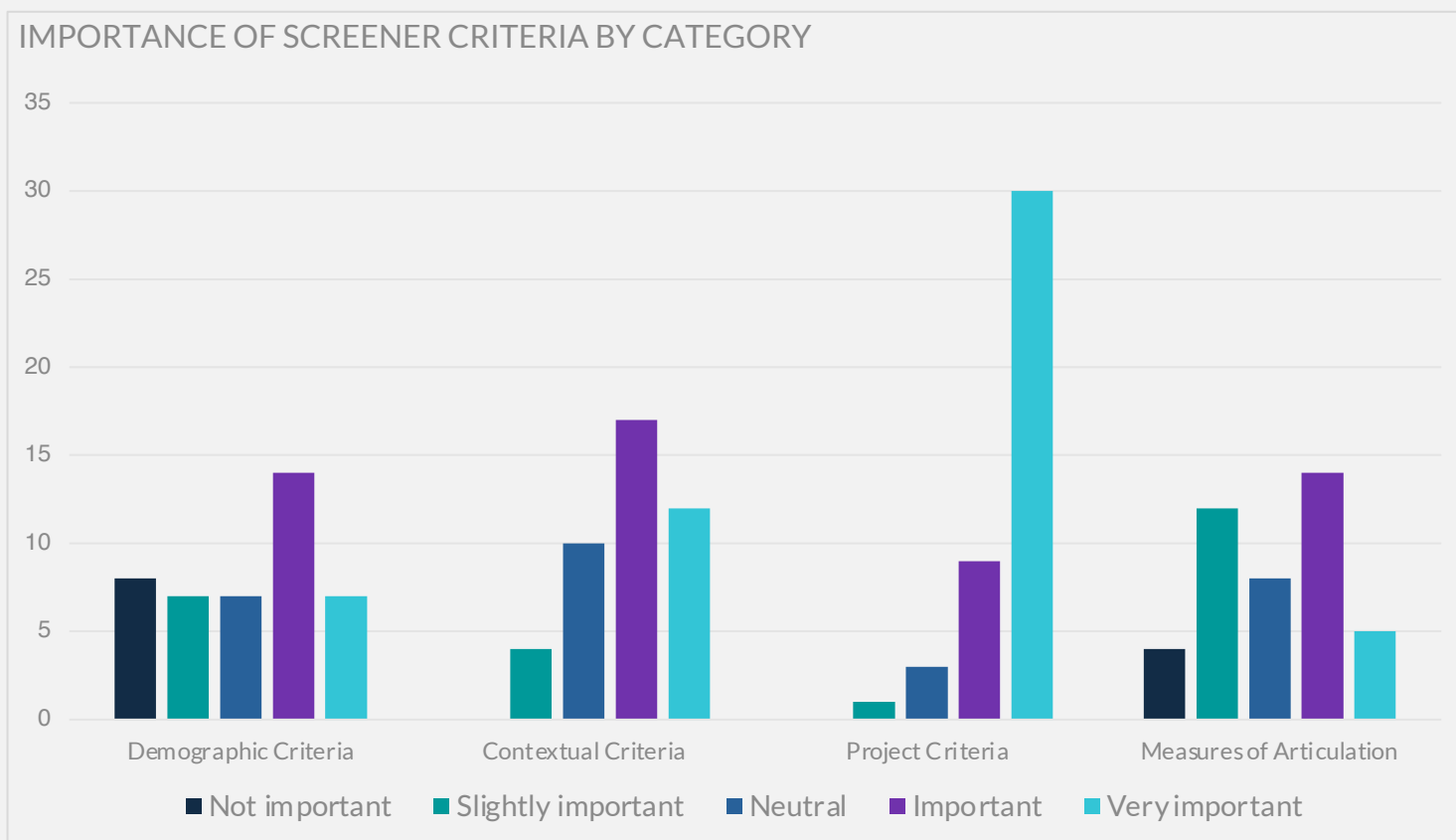
**Do we need to change
our approach?**

So I ran a survey.

I created a survey where I asked researchers to share with me...

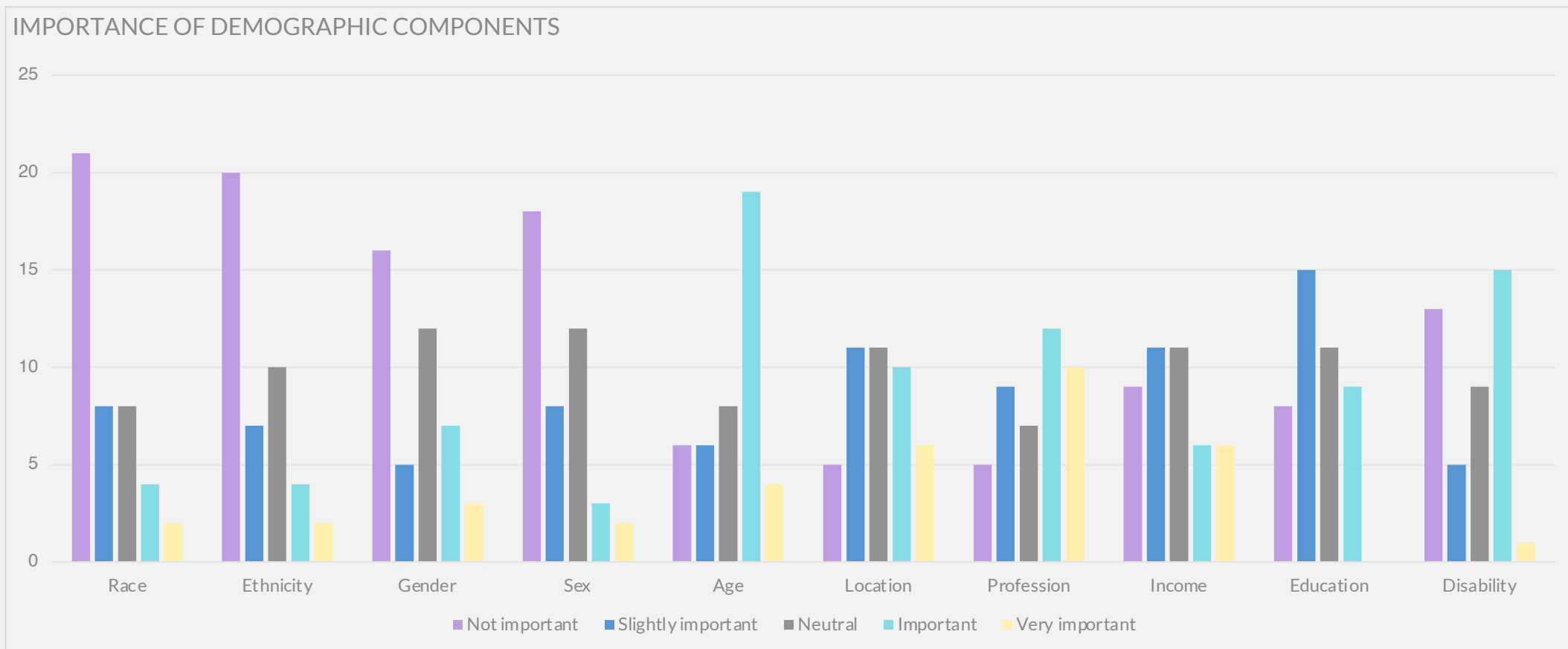
- Their own **self-identified demographics**
- How they weight the **importance of demographic criteria** relative to contextual information, project-specific criteria, and measures of articulation
- How they weight the importance of **individual demographic components** (i.e. race, gender, income) relative to all other demographic criteria
- How **flexible or inflexible** their demographic quotas (or lack thereof) are when the recruit timeline runs into the study dates

How important is...

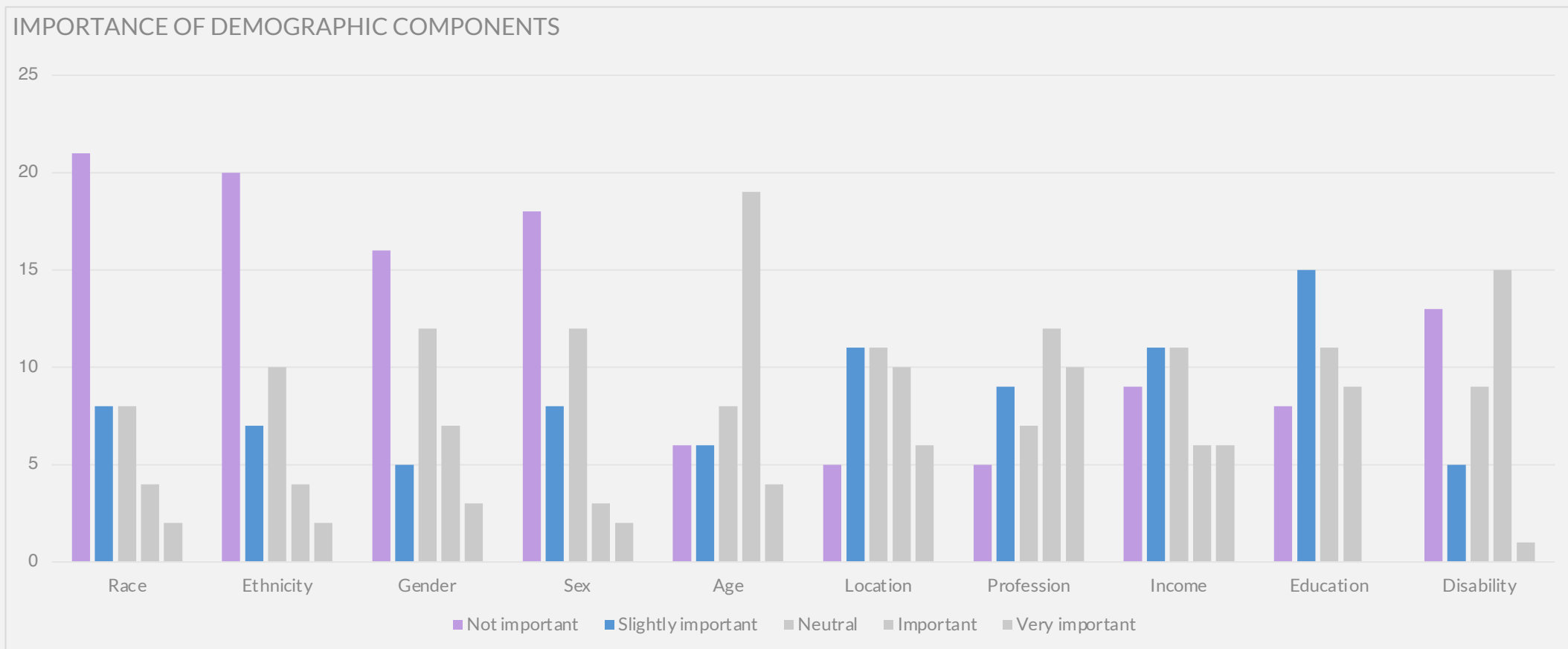


1. Project-specific criteria
2. Contextual info
3. Demographic criteria and measures of articulation

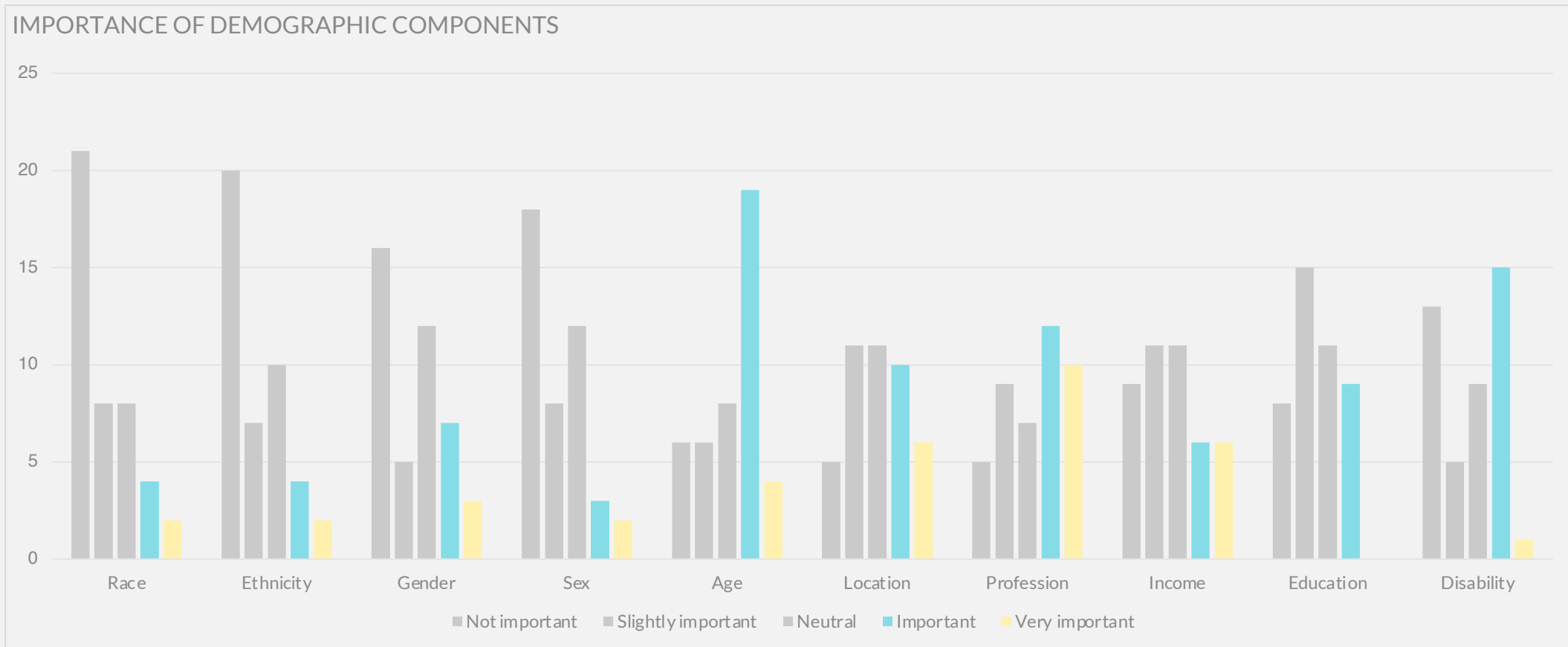
The demographic hierarchy.



The demographic hierarchy.



The demographic hierarchy.



The demographic hierarchy.

1. Profession
2. Age
3. Location
4. Income & Disability Status
5. Education
6. Gender
7. Ethnicity & Sex
8. Race

Two beliefs emerged.

- Demographics don't shape participant behavior.
- We know demographics do shape behavior, but we can only do our best.

Demographics don't shape behavior.

We don't really need **demographics**—we focus more on **behaviors** and **experiences**.

Because it **doesn't matter too much** to us about things like gender, race, etc., as long as the participants fit our other **behavioral criteria**.

...insights are **less dependent on demographics** per se, and more dependent on **behavioral differences**, so willing to be flexible.

...sometimes some of these criteria were **requested** by business partners, but I **don't think they're relevant**.

Our population is **very broad**, and we are focused on **what they do**—we are **not marketing**.

Structural and social inequality.

A condition, **often invisible**, in which commonly-accepted **policies, practices and social norms** prioritize the needs of some social groups to the **detriment** of others.

We do what we can.

I might **budge a little bit**, as long as there is **some representation**, even if it is not the number I originally targeted.

Demographic mix is **more aspirational** - nice to have if we can, and if we can't, then **something's gotta give** and we have to complete the study.

Perfection in a recruit can sometimes be a tall order. **Flexibility** is necessary.

It's **less important** than the timeline slipping.

We can change what we do.

Demographic criteria are only flexible because **we allow them to be.**

By creating screening and recruiting methods that **acknowledge and attempt to address** the homogeneity of the people we usually talk to, we can **craft solutions** that more expansively **address the needs of all our users.**

Case study

What does the healthcare experience look like for independent, employer-insured adults living in Massachusetts?

Setting a quota.

- Asked for at least 5 non-white participants, reflective of the client population.
- The recruiter came back multiple times with lists that included too few non-white participants.
- The final yield included 6 non-white participants.

Tactic:

Mad*Pow had to be **explicit and specific** in the ask, and make clear that racial criteria was **not flexible**.

“Well, my first priority was **female, African-American**... It's not that any person of any race would be any lesser quality, **it's just comforting to find someone who can relate to you**, particularly in healthcare where African Americans are **under-prescribed and under-diagnosed.**”

“[Being a black man] does tend to influence your healthcare experience. I find that **[doctors] do not give as much attention to me** as they do to my wife. I find that they have the **expectation that you're more resistant** and there's more focus given to **white first in healthcare** as a patient.”

Case study

What happens when we don't insist on diversity in our recruits?

The recruit didn't deliver.

- Comprehension and actionability of a health insurance “welcome letter” to new members.
- The audience was approximately 80% non-white and had a large percentage of ESL or non-English-speaking Spanish speakers.
- The client felt that hiring a Spanish-speaking moderator was too expensive to consider.
- The recruiter came back with 17% non-white participants.
- All participants spoke English as their first and primary language.

We don't know what we don't know.

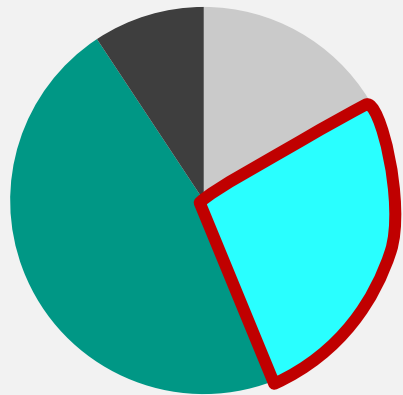
Assumptions, even when well-informed, are **not necessarily reflective of reality**, and **acting on incorrect assumptions** has the potential to do **more harm than good**.

Tactics and Approaches

- Get specific
- Screen your recruiters
- Go outside your network
- Hire a diverse research team

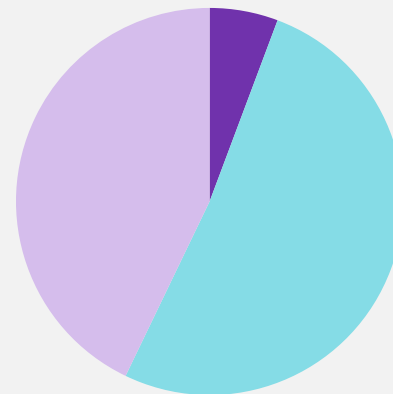
Get specific.

DEMOGRAPHIC ASKS



- No demographic criteria
- A specific number
- A "mix"
- Other

HOW FLEXIBLE ARE YOUR QUOTAS?



- Very flexible
- Flexible
- A little flexible
- Not flexible

Screen your recruiters.

- Identify your desired demographic makeup.
- Reach out to the recruiter beforehand and ask them whether the demographic numbers are feasible for them.
- If not, consider shopping your screener around to other options.

Go outside your network.

“...**relatively few** adults say they have a lot in common with **those who don't share their own racial background**. This is especially true of adults who are **only one race**.”

– *Multiracial in America*

Safety in numbers during design research



Nick Bowmast [Follow](#)
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Article by Nick Bowman

Researchers: stay safe and reasonably uncomfortable



Yasmine [Follow](#)
Jun 25, 2018 · 3 min read



As a researcher in FinTech, speaking to people living on the edge economically has been an important part of my work. In-home interviews are an impactful way to get authentic stories that shift minds. That's brought me to a few very rough neighborhoods and into a lot of living situations I would not otherwise see firsthand.

Article by Yasmine Khan

Hire a diverse research team.

- If your team is made up of a group of people with the same characteristics and backgrounds, they are going to bring a similar perspective to every aspect of the research process.

“I’m talking about **real diversity**, the diversity of experience, thought, and perspective which can only thrive in work **environments that support** all ability statuses, gender identities, races, ethnicities, ages, religions, and culture.”

– *Vivianne Castillo*

Diversity is worth the effort.

- If demographics impact experiences, then we should recruit **participants who accurately reflect our users.**
- If we talk to a homogeneous group, our findings will only reflect **their perspectives.**
- This means **making assumptions** about everyone else or **choosing to ignore them.**

The conversation is ongoing.

- There are tactics we can try:
 - Insisting on specific quotas
 - Making it easier for participants to enroll and attend
 - Recognizing superfluous barriers in the screening criteria
 - Making your expectations clear with recruiters
 - Acknowledging the research's team privilege and hiring new perspectives
 - Going outside your network for friends and family recruits
- This is a conversation we need to continue to have and evolve.

Thank you!

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