



New Member Spotlight: Michael Kraus on Talking about Racism in America

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“Real progress toward racial equity in the United States must be based in an American public with a more accurate conception of the complex and constant role of race and racism in our nation.” - Michael Kraus, Yale University

For this new member spotlight, SSN is excited to highlight Professor [Michael Kraus](#) and his work on understanding and changing public perceptions of social inequities, specifically those that center on race and racism.

For his membership contribution, Kraus compiled key findings and recommendations from a recent collaborative [research project](#) into a brief for SSN: [Why We Should Talk About Racism—And How To Do It](#). Inspired by seeing the need for a better connection between experts and the public in a time filled with misinformation, he wrote this brief to share the importance of talking about racism and to offer tips on how to do so. Kraus told SSN, “Psychologists in particular have a lot to contribute in the fight against this misinformation, because psychology plays a central role in determining what kinds of stories we adopt versus reject as part of our understanding of the world.”

In the brief, Kraus notes that discussions of racial justice – and subsequent white backlash – have been a persistent conflict in American public discourse and politics. Most recently, this could be seen in the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020 and the response by conservative politicians who banned discussions of racism in American classrooms. Kraus argues that these discussions should not be avoided but embraced because, “the evidence suggests that confronting the complex and constant role of race and racism, rather than avoiding it, is the path forward to political progress.”

In his brief, Kraus also highlights research that reveals that talking about race directly, as opposed to a neutral messaging strategy favored by moderates, proves more effective in increasing support for economic policies that reduce inequalities. These findings echo his own research that found sharing real data on Black-white inequality to be the most successful strategy in changing participants’ understandings of the Black-white wealth gap and the structural nature of racism.

Closing his brief, Kraus again emphasizes the importance of confronting the role of race and racism in our nation:

“What our study and others suggest is that the American public is both ready and able to handle the challenge of discussing American racism. In the end, there is no race-neutral path to achieving the racially egalitarian society many of us desire. Instead, the American public must bravely contend with the racism that is part of our past and present reality.”

Looking forward, Kraus is working on new research that examines how to use the strategies mentioned in his brief for messaging about specific policies to improve equity, like baby bonds. He is also working with his graduate student trainee, Brittany Torrez, to understand the consequences of optimistic beliefs about progress for diversity efforts.

To learn more, read his [SSN Key Findings Brief here](#).

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Dr. Michael Kraus is an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior at Yale University in the Yale School of Management. His research focuses on the beliefs, behaviors, and emotional states that maintain and perpetuate societal inequity. Overarching themes in Kraus' writings include why people use power unethically, why everyday Americans overestimate racial inequality in society, and how people can resist psychological tendencies to downplay and dismiss societal racism.