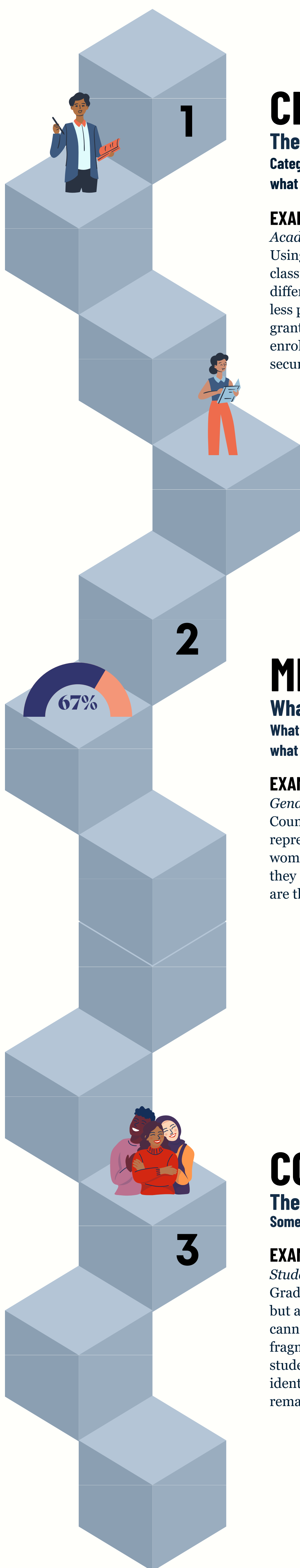


# DATA IS NEVER NEUTRAL

Data doesn't simply reflect reality—it shapes our view of it. Like a camera, it can't capture every nuance. By examining what data is included in the “frame” and what's brought into focus within it, we can reveal the values that inform those choices and better understand the biases and assumptions that shape the data we see.



## CLASSIFICATION

### The Power to Divide & Define

Categories shape how people see the world--and what they overlook.

#### EXAMPLE

*Academic Hierarchies:*

Using “temporary” and “permanent” as the sole classification for employment status hides other differences. In academia, teaching faculty often have less power than research faculty who control major grants. Even among teaching faculty, those in large-enrollment fields may enjoy more influence and security than those in smaller departments.

#### REMEMBER

Every category reveals some things while hiding others. The power lies in deciding which categories are used—determining what comes into focus and what stays out of view.

#### ASK

How does the way data is categorized highlight some experiences while overlooking others?

## MEASUREMENT

### What is Worth Counting?

What people measure defines what matters—and what disappears.

#### EXAMPLE

*Gender Parity in Leadership:*

Counting women in executive roles shows representation but misses other dynamics. Do these women control budgets, and if so, of what size? Do they make strategic decisions that can be enforced, or are they figureheads in male-dominated systems?

#### REMEMBER

Measurement reflects priorities. Counting presence without measuring other forms of power risks turning visibility into a stand-in for progress.

#### ASK

What's left out of measurement, and why?

## COUNTING

### There are Limits

Some things can't be counted—and that matters.

#### EXAMPLE

*Student Belonging in Education:*

Graduation rates and test scores are easy to measure, but a student's sense of cultural identity and belonging cannot be reduced to numbers. Surveys may capture fragments, but they fail to reflect the nuanced ways students connect with their peers, environment, or identity—factors that profoundly shape outcomes but remain invisible in data-driven policies.

#### REMEMBER

Not everything that matters can be measured. Recognizing the limits of data allows us to prioritize intangible, qualitative realities that numbers can't capture.

#### ASK

How can we acknowledge and value what can't be counted?

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# INTERPRETATION

## Framing the Narrative

Data tells a story—but whose story?

### EXAMPLE

*Crime Statistics:*

Rising arrest rates in some neighborhoods often reflect increased policing, not increased crime. This narrative can shift blame while ignoring systemic drivers like poverty or policy decisions.

### REMEMBER

Understanding how narratives are framed helps us challenge biases and uncover systemic issues.

### ASK

Whose story does the data tell, and how can it highlight deeper truths?

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# PRESENTATION

## Persuasion in Disguise

How data is presented influences what people believe.

### EXAMPLE

*Economic Growth Graphs:*

GDP growth suggests progress but hides growing inequality and environmental costs. Pairing this data with stagnant wages or carbon emissions reveals a fuller picture.

### REMEMBER

Visuals decide what seems true. Highlighting GDP growth assumes success, while ignoring inequality prioritizes profit over people.

### ASK

How does presentation shape what the data says?

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# GOVERNANCE

## Data is a Tool of Power

Data shapes who is seen - and who is seen can often be controlled.

### EXAMPLE

*Tracking Activity:*

Employers often track workers' keystrokes or tasks for 'accountability,' but managers usually face no similar scrutiny from their employees.

### REMEMBER

Knowledge is power. Data governs. By questioning why data is being collected and whose interests it can be used to serve, we can redesign systems to empower rather than control. Visibility isn't always a good thing.

### ASK

Who controls the data, and does it empower or enforce?

# DATA IS A TOOL

## Learn how it's used

Like any tool, its design reveals its intention. By examining how data is categorized, collected, interpreted, and presented, we can better understand who the data is meant to serve.