Applying Bystander Intervention Theory to Racial Microaggressions

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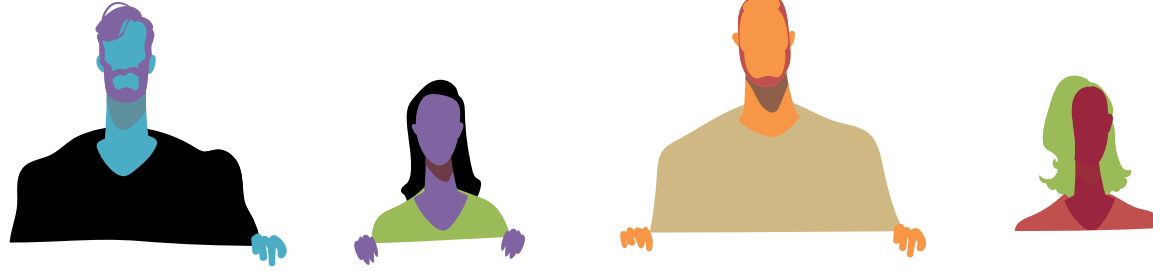Khyati Verma

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Da'Shay Portis

Agenda

- Microaggressions
- Microinterventions
- Bystander Intervention Model
- Bystander Intervention to Racial Microaggressions
- Preliminary Study Findings
- Implications for Educators

What are Microaggressions?

Microaggressions are common unintentional forms of discrimination that have been shown to be psychologically and physically detrimental to people from marginalized groups (Sue et al., 2008).

Types of Microaggressions

Microassaults

overt, intentional acts of discrimination

Microinsults

unintentional behavior or verbal statement that conveys rudeness and insensitivity

Microinvalidations

unintentional actions that negates or minimizes the feelings, thoughts or experiences that are a reality for a certain marginalized group

(Sue et al., 2008)
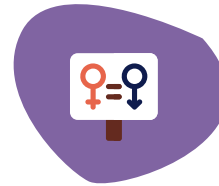
Microinsults Consist of:

An ascription of intelligence

"You are a credit to your race."

Second class citizenship

Person of color confused for a service worker

Pathologizing values and communications

Dismissing a person because they bring up race in class discussions

An assumption of criminal status

Hugging your purse when a person of a certain race walks by

(Sue et al., 2008)

Microinvalidations Include:

"Where are you from?"

Feeling that one is alien in one's own land where members from a marginalized group are assumed to all be foreigners.

"When I look at you, I don't see color."

Colorblindness or a refusal to admit that one does see color.

"I'm not racist. I have a Black friend.

A denial that one has discriminatory attitudes or a disowning of one's role in the continuation of discrimination

"Everyone can achieve their goals, if they work hard enough."

Myth of meritocracy.

(Sue et al., 2008)

Environmental Invalidations

Can be a microinvalidation, microinsult, or microassault

Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color

Television shows and movies that highlight predominantly White people, without representation of people of color

#OscarsSoWhite

Microaggressions Project

Consider….

Can you think of a time you saw someone engaged in a microaggression?
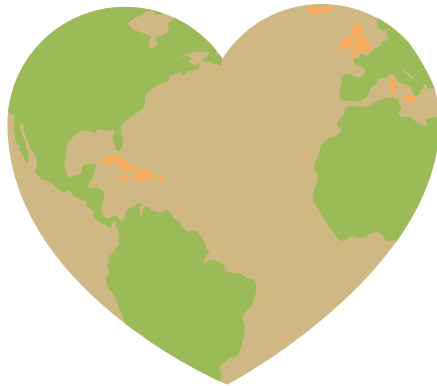
What did you see?

We All Engage in Microaggressions…

Even Me…

Microinterventions

The Burden is Real!

Microinterventions Provide…

Validation
Of their experiential reality

Value
As a person/human

Affirmation
Of their racial identity or group identity

Support
And encouragement

ReassurAance
That they are not alone

(Sue et al., 2019)

Strategic Goals
of Microinterventions

Make the "Invisible" Visible	Disarm the Microaggression
Educate the Offender	Seek External Support When Needed

Sue et al., 2019

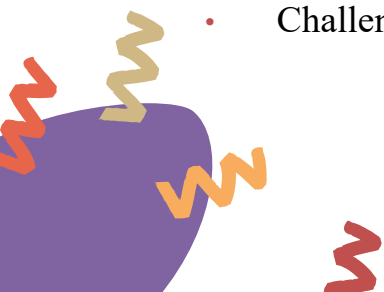# 1. Make the "Invisible" Visible

Institution /System

- Solicit feedback from peers
- Monitor trends around setting

Perpetrator /Offender

- Make the meta-communication explicit
- Challenge the stereotype

Society /Community

- Partner with institutions / organize demonstrations
- Disseminate research to public

Sue et al., 2019

Metacommunication: "Black men are dangerous, potentially criminal, or up to no good."

- "Relax, I am not dangerous"
- "Don't worry, John is a good person"
- "You assume I'm dangerous because of the way I look?"
- "I may be ___, but that does not make me dangerous"
- "Robberies and crimes are committed by people of all races and backgrounds"
- "Do you realize what you just did when I walked in?"
- "Do you feel afraid to be in this elevator with me?"

Disarm the Micro/Macroaggression

Perpetrator /Offender

- Express disagreement, set values & limits
- Use non-verbal communication, interrupt/redirect

Institution /System

- Boycott, strike, protest; financial repercussions
- Notify press & leadership, serve on boards

Society /Community

- Protest perpetuating political leaders and policies
- Attend townhalls; lobby to congressmen & senators

Sue et al., 2019

Metacommunication: "People with disabilities only receive opportunities through special accommodations rather than through their own capabilities or merit."

- "I don't agree with what you just said."

- "That's not how I view it."

- "You know that respect and tolerance are important values in my life and, while I understand that you have a right to say what you want, I'm asking you to show a little more respect for me by not making offensive comments."

- "Ouch!"
  - "Ahhh, C'mon!"
  - Shaking your head
  - Looking down or away
  - Covering your mouth with your hand

- "Whoa, let's not go there. Maybe we should focus on the task at hand." "That behavior is against our code of conduct and could really get you in trouble."
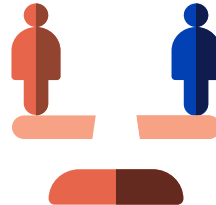
Educate the Offender(s)

Perpetrator /Offender

- Point out commonality; promote empath
- Differentiate intent from impact; appeal to values & principles

Institution /System

- Benefits of workforce diversity
- Infuse multicultural principles; institute long-term, mandated trainings

Society /Community

- Teach children about prejudice, discriminations, & racism; increase diverse exposure
- Challenge bystanders; identify shared goals

(Sue et al., 2019)

Metacommunication: "All Arab Americans are potential terrorists."

- "I know you didn't realize this but that comment you made was demeaning to Maryam because not all Arab Americans are a threat to national security."

- "That is a negative stereotype of Arab Americans. Did you know Maryam also aspires to be a doctor just like you? You should talk to her; you actually have a lot in common."

- "I know you are studying clinical psychology. Learning about why those stereotypes are harmful is going to make you a better clinician."

- Report the incident in person or use anonymous online portals such as the Southern Poverty Law Center or use a hashtag on social media to make your experience go viral

- Choose a friend with whom you can always check in and process discriminatory experiences

- Join a support group such as "current events group" that meets weekly to process issues concerning minorities

Seek External Intervention

Perpetrator /Offender

- Report acts; alert authorities
- Seek professionals (therapist, counselor, spiritual advisor); attend support groups
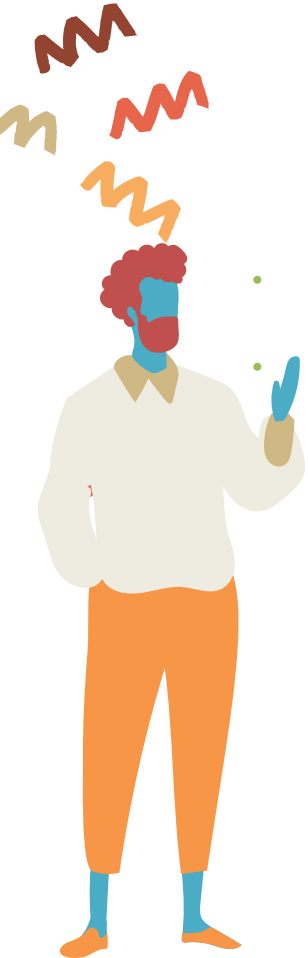
Society /Community

- Foster cooperation & community over competition
- Create caucuses, safe spaces, healing circles, vigils, memorials

Institution /System

- Report inequitable practices; conduct cultural assessments/audits
- Networking/mentoring opportunities for underrepresented population;

(Sue et al., 2019)

Metacommunication: "As a person of color, you cannot afford to live in this area."

- Ask to speak to a superior or someone who is in authority

- Report the incident in person or use anonymous online portals such as the Southern Poverty Law Center or use a hashtag on social media to make your experience go viral

- Seek out individual counseling with culturally competent providers for self-care and well-being

- Turn to your community leaders or members for support

- Choose a friend with whom you can always check in and process discriminatory experiences

- Join a support group such as "current events group" that meets weekly to process issues concerning minorities
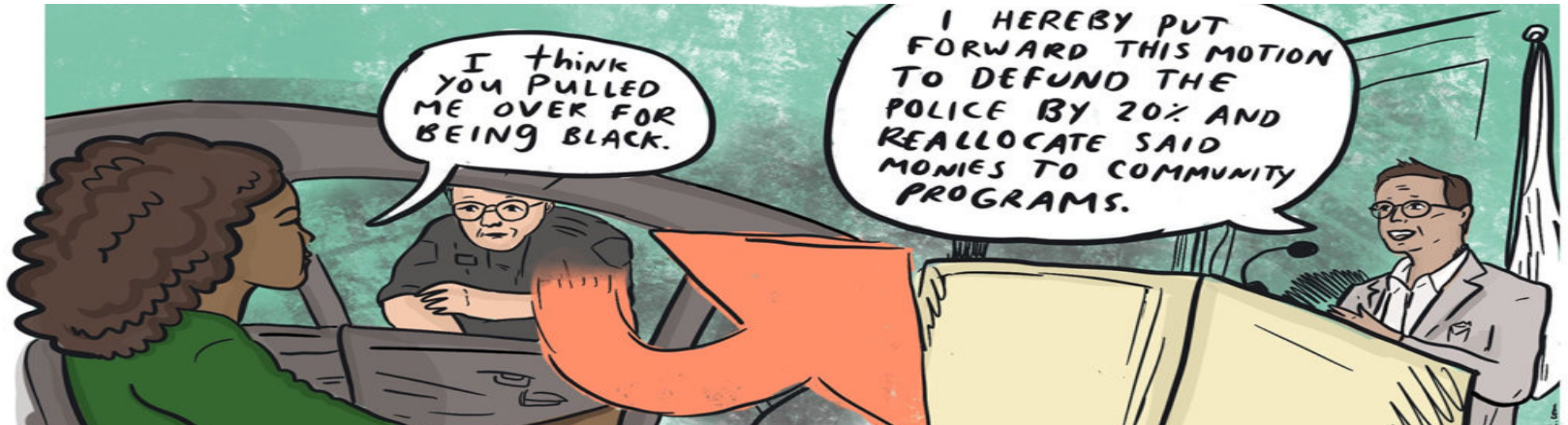
Situational Considerations of Context

Pick Your Battles

Consider Location & Time of When to Address

Adjust Your Response as Needed

Be Aware of Relationship Factors & Dynamics with Peers

Always Consider Consequences of action (e.g. role differentials)

(Sue et al., 2019)

Bystander Intervention to Racial Microaggressions in College Students

- We propose an innovative approach to studying racial microaggression interventions by pulling from theory on microinterventions and research on the role of bystander intervention in other types of aggression (e.g., bullying, sexual harassment).

Parallels Between Bullying and Microaggressions

Bullying

- Psychologically painful and at times physically painful to target
- Difficult to confront perpetrator
- *Usually intentional*
- Numerous ways to intervene as a bystander

Microaggressions

- Psychologically painful to target
- Difficult to confront perpetrator
- *Usually unintentional*
- Numerous ways to intervene as a bystander

Bullying Roles

Primary Roles (~20%)

- Bully

- Victim

Bystander Roles (~70-80%)

- Assistant

- Defender

- Outsider

Bully

Victim

Assistant

Defender

Outsider

Salmivalli et al., 1996

Bystanders in Bullying

- Over 80% of bullying occurs in the presence of bystanders, who intervene less than 20% of the time

    – Most say they are disgusted by bullying, but don't help because:

"No one else is doing anything" (diffusion of responsibility)

"It's going to get turned on me" (fear of retaliation)

"Everyone else must think it's OK" (pluralistic ignorance)

"He/she got what was coming" (blame the victim; just world)

Barhight, Hubbard, & Hyde, 2013; Cappadocia, Pepler, Cummings, & Craig, 2012; Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005; Rigby & Johnson, 2006

Importance of Bystanders in Bullying

- Reinforcing, assisting, or ignoring rewards the perpetrator and contributes to pro-bullying norms

- Defending can help reduce bullying

- Victims who have peers that defend them have higher self-esteem, greater feelings of safety, and less anxiety and depression

Craig & Pepler, 1997; Craig, Pepler, & Atlas (2000); Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni (2008); Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli (2011); Salmivalli (2010)

Bystander Effect

(Latané & Darley, 1968)

- Presence of others discourages an individual from intervening in an emergency situation

- Variables related to bystanders
  - Diffusion of responsibility
  - Cost (time, effort, distress)
  - Social stigmatization of victim

The Rape and Murder of Kitty Genovese: When Witnesses Don't Help (The Bystander Effect)

Bystander Effect

- Presence of others discourages an individual from intervening in an emergency situation

- Variables related to bystanders
  - Diffusion of responsibility
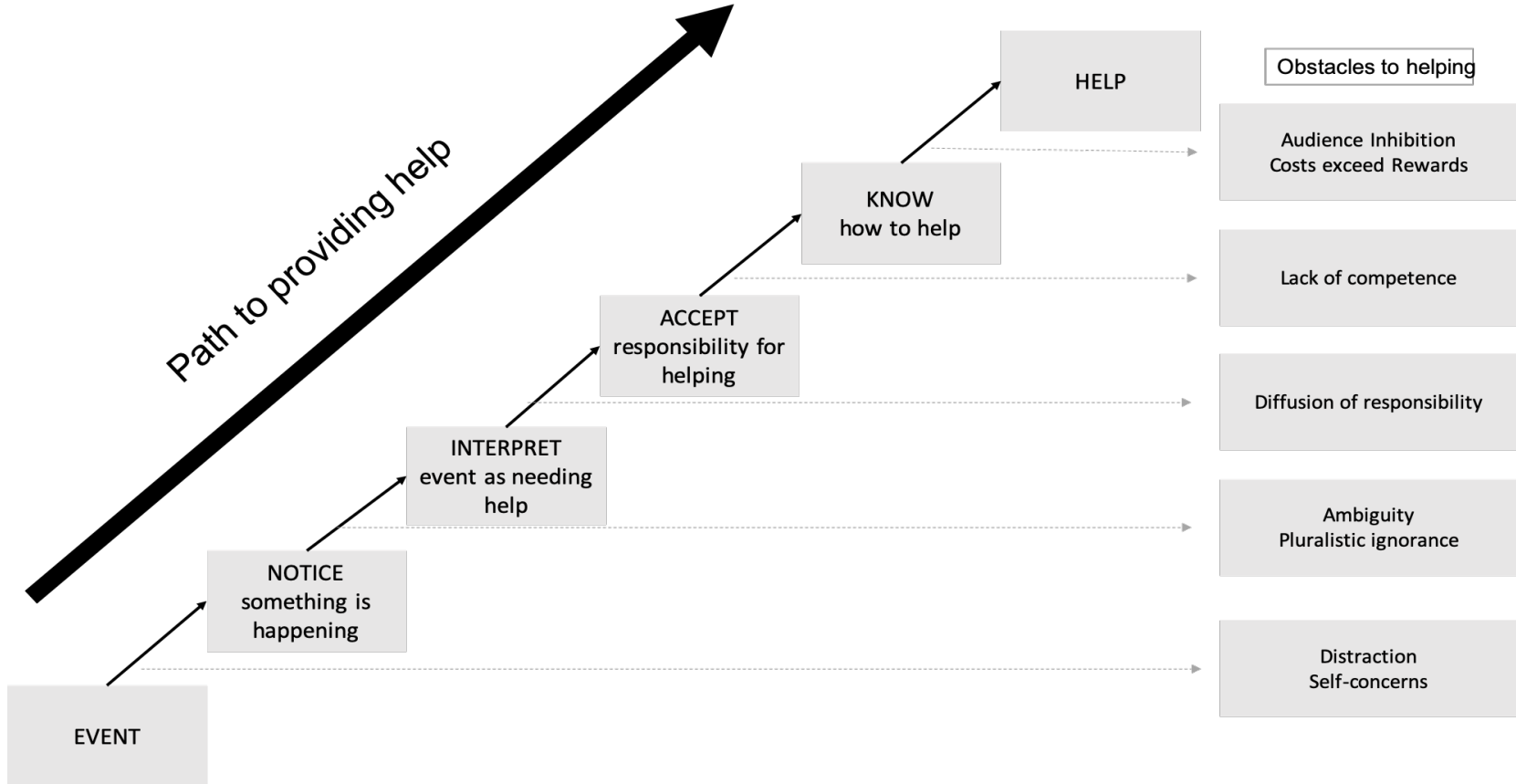 - Cost (time, effort, distress)

Latané & Darley, 1968

5 Step Bystander Intervention Model

Theory to Practice

- Ultimately, our research strives to understand and facilitate bystanders' decisions to intervene when they see racial microaggressions.

Our Recent Study-Demographics

- 406 college attending young adults aged 18-25 years in the United States
- Sex
  - 45.8% women
  - 52% men
  - .7% other
- Race
  - 15.8% Asian
  - 9.6% Native American, American Indian
  - 22.2% Black
  - .2% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 6.4% Multiracial
  - 45.6% White

Our Recent Study-Procedures

- Self-report surveys with well-established and adapted measures distributed through Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk)
  - Experiences with intervening in racial microaggressions
  - Hypothesized bystander intervention reaction if they saw racial microaggressions
  - Moral disengagement
  - Empathy
  - Self-Efficacy

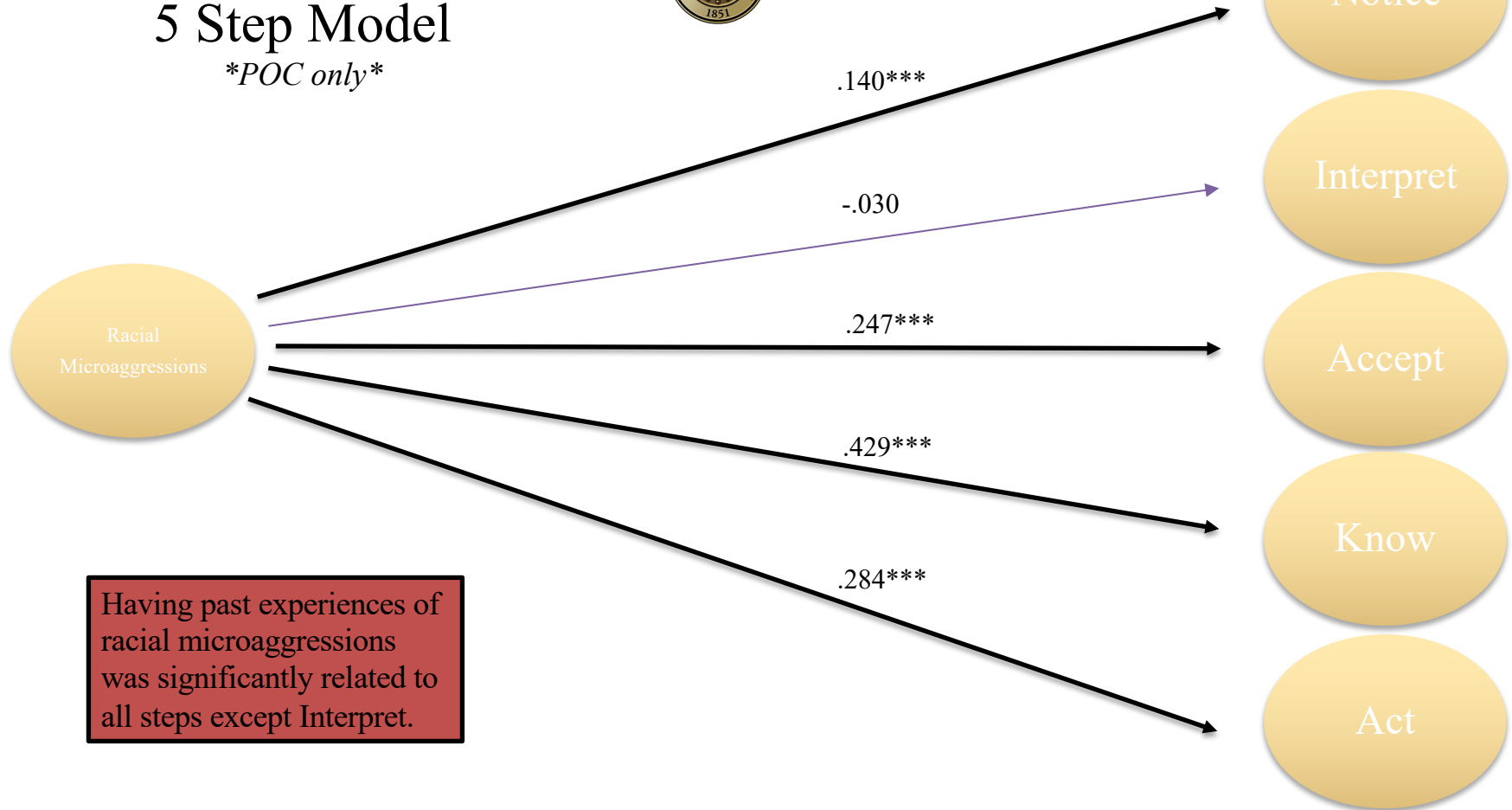| If I saw a racial microaggression, I would......	% Agree or Strongly Agree	
	POC	White
bring the microaggression to the perpetrator's awareness.	80.5	81.6
challenge the inherent stereotype.	74.1	70.8
ask the perpetrator to clarify their statement/behavior.	79.5	75.1
defend the target.	81.4	83.2
indicate that the perpetrator said something offensive.	80.9	80.5
challenge the perpetrator to consider the impact of what they said/did.	74.1	75.1
stop the perpetrator from engaging in the microaggression.	**72.3**	**80.0**
communicate to the perpetrator that you disagree or disapprove of what they just said/did.	**77.7**	**67.3**
engage in a discussion with the perpetrator about why what they said or did is offensive.	71.8	75.1
facilitate a conversation with the perpetrator about biases and how they manifest.	69.5	72.4
encourage the perpetrator to explore the source of their beliefs and attitudes.	68.6	72.4
check in with the target to see how they are doing.	**90.0**	**80.5**
report the perpetrator to a higher authority.	**65.5**	**73.0**
communicate to the perpetrator that bigoted behavior is not tolerated or accepted.	**78.6**	**83.8**

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

5 Step Model

Each step significantly related to subsequent step.

Notice		Interpret		Accept		Know		Act
	.91***		.75***		.97***		.88***	

5 Step Model
POC only

Notice

.140***

Interpret

-.030

Racial
Microaggressions

.247***

Accept

.429***

Know

.284***
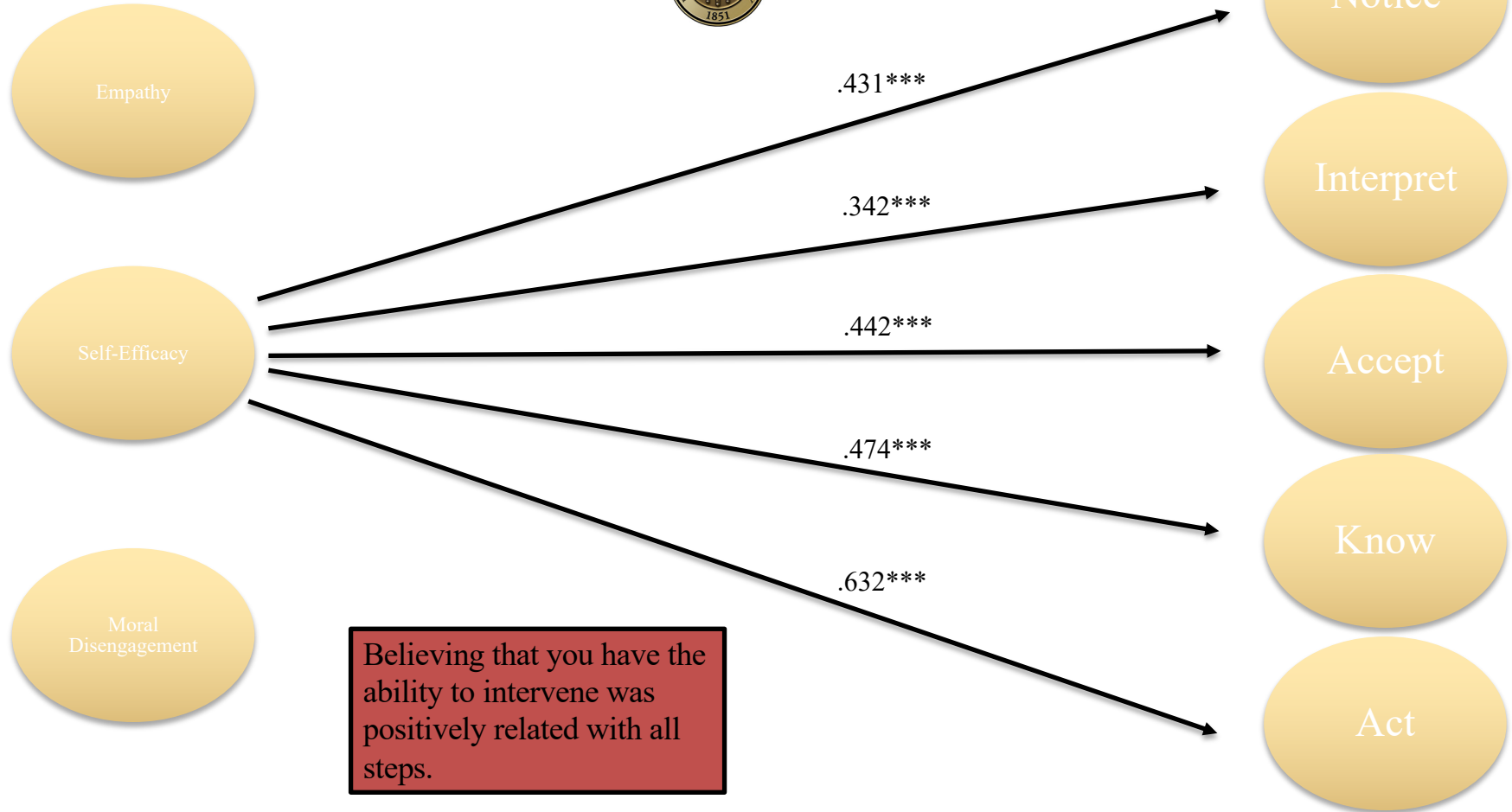
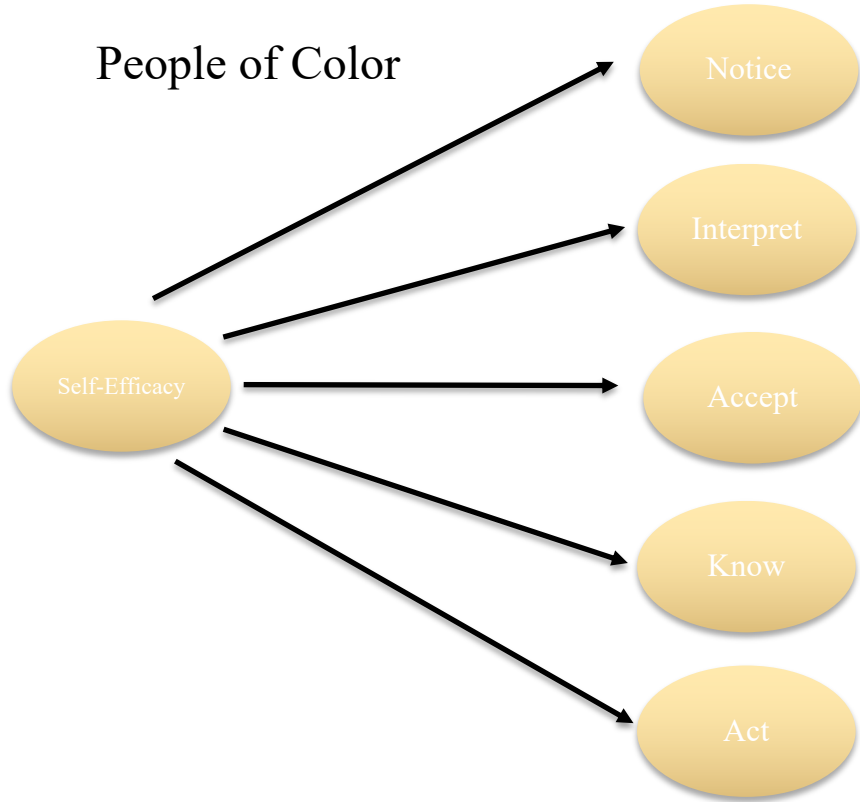Having past experiences of
racial microaggressions
was significantly related to
all steps except Interpret.

Act

People of Color

Notice

Interpret
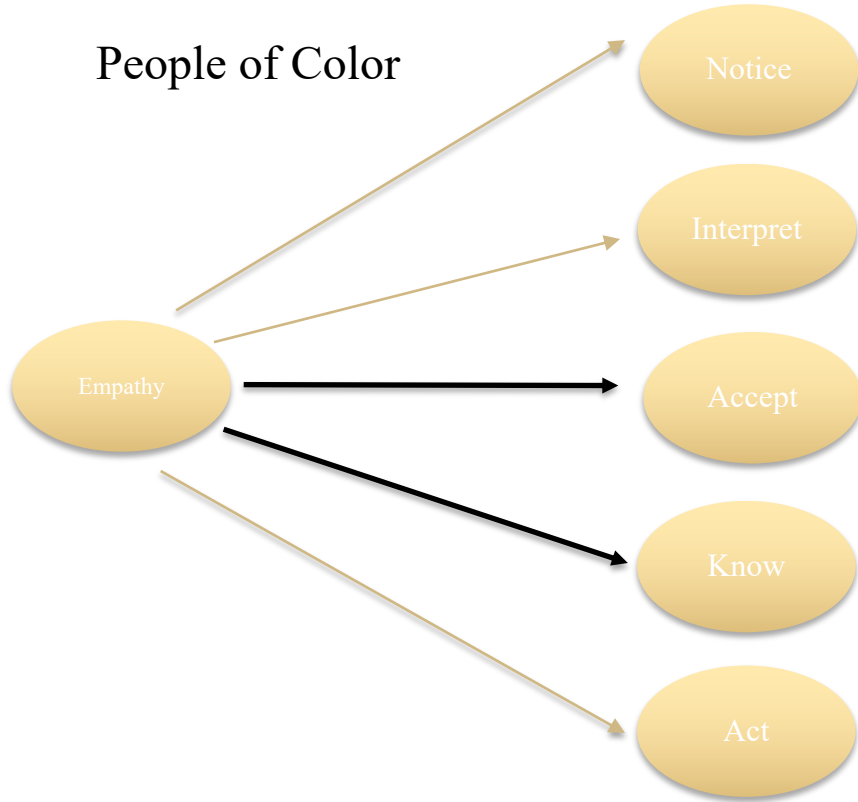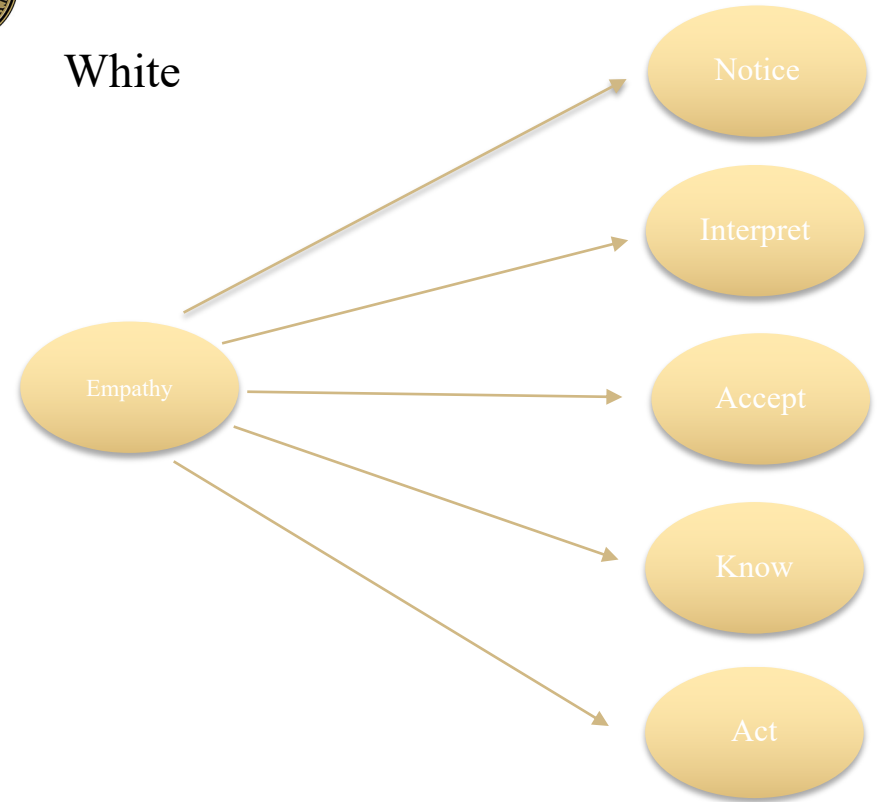
Accept

Know

Act

Self-Efficacy

White

Notice

Interpret

Accept

Know

Act

Self-Efficacy

Empathy

Self-Efficacy

Moral Disengagement

Notice

Interpret

Accept

Know

Act

.098

.121

.177***

.064

.044
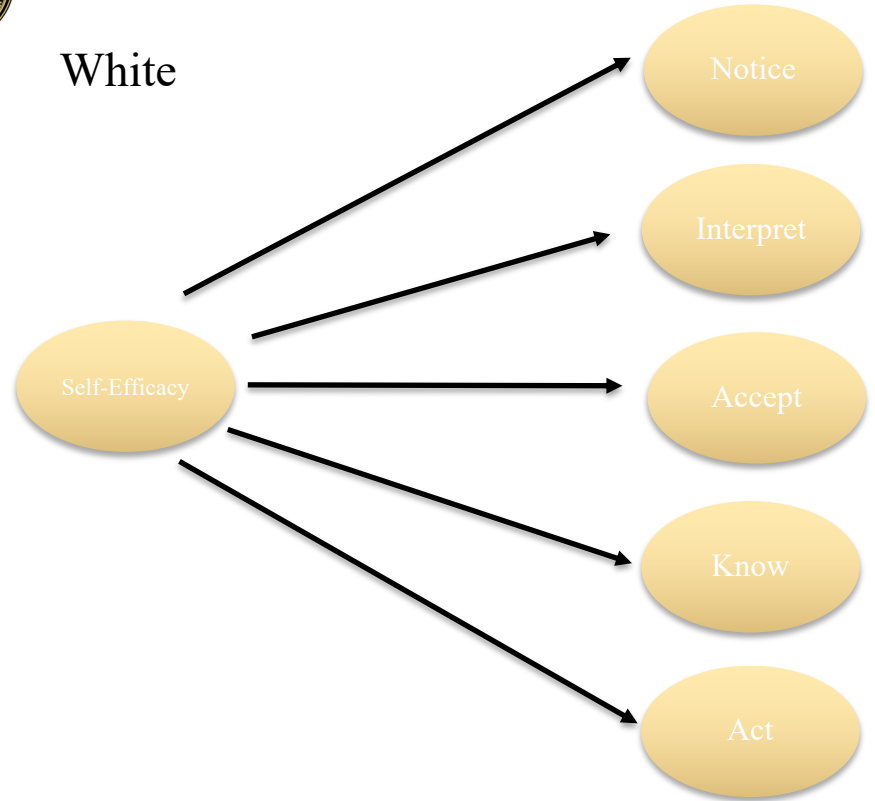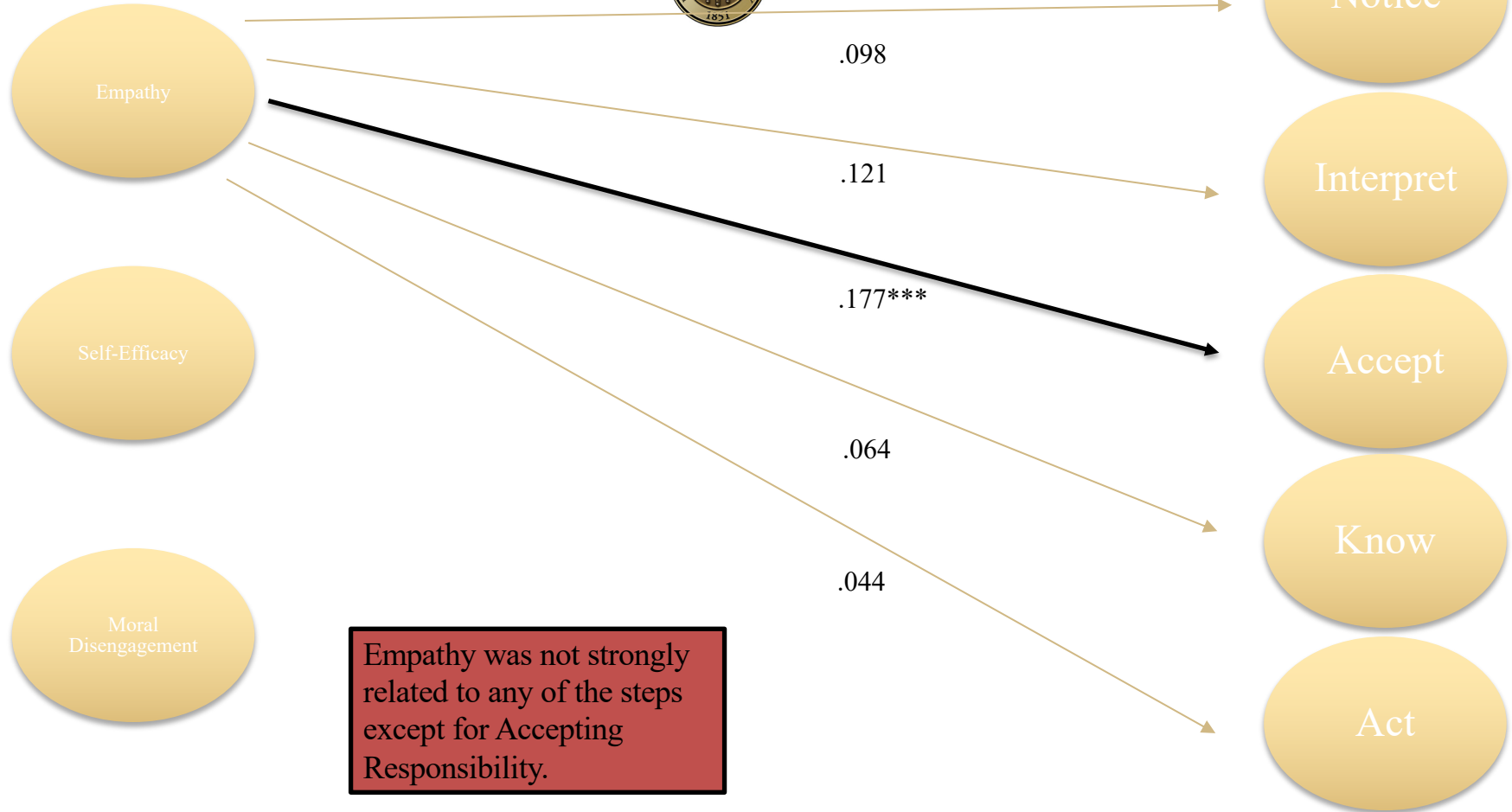
Empathy was not strongly related to any of the steps except for Accepting Responsibility.

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Empathy

Self-Efficacy

Moral Disengagement

Notice

Interpret

Accept

Know

Act

Viewing racial microaggressions as acceptable is connected to being less likely to interpret them as a problem, but more likely to accept responsibility and know what to do.

SAY WHAT?!
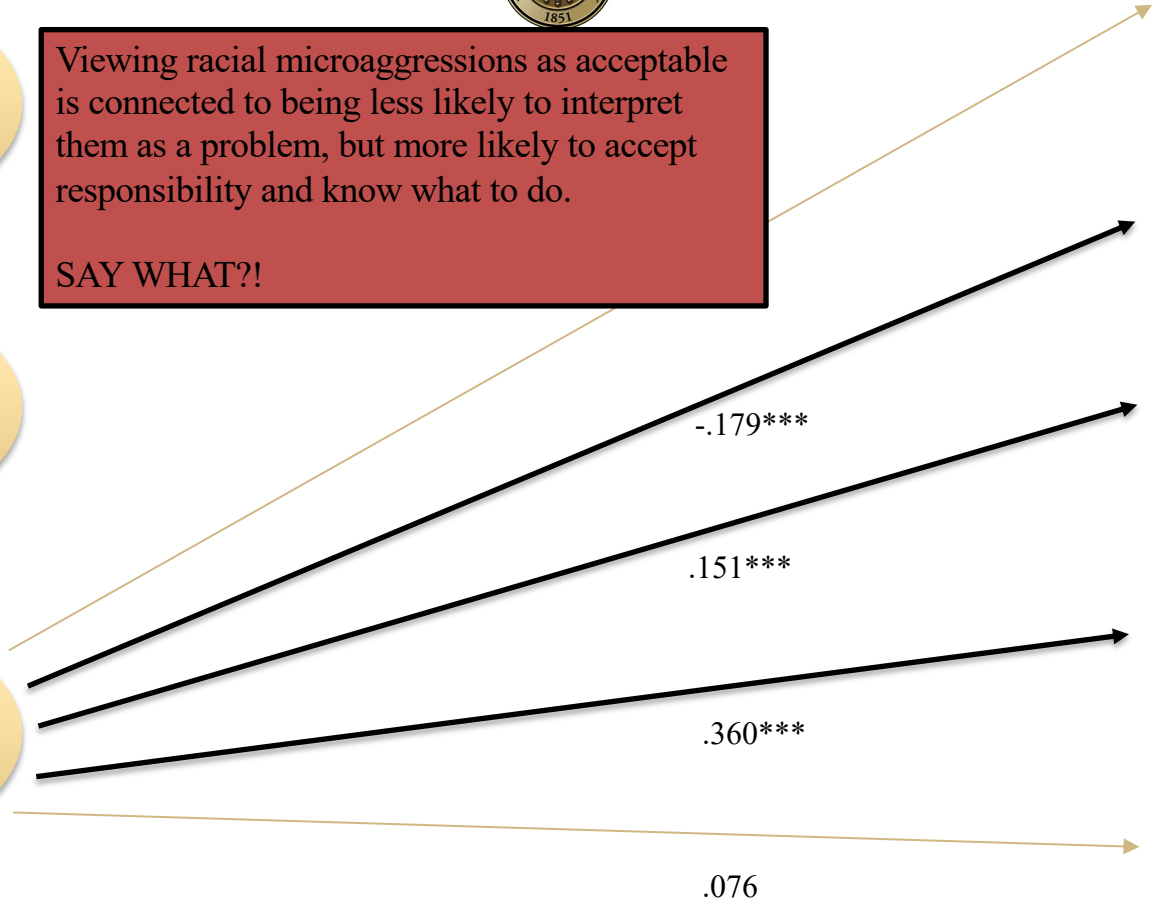
-.179***

.151***

.360***

.076

People of Color

White

Notice
Interpret
Accept
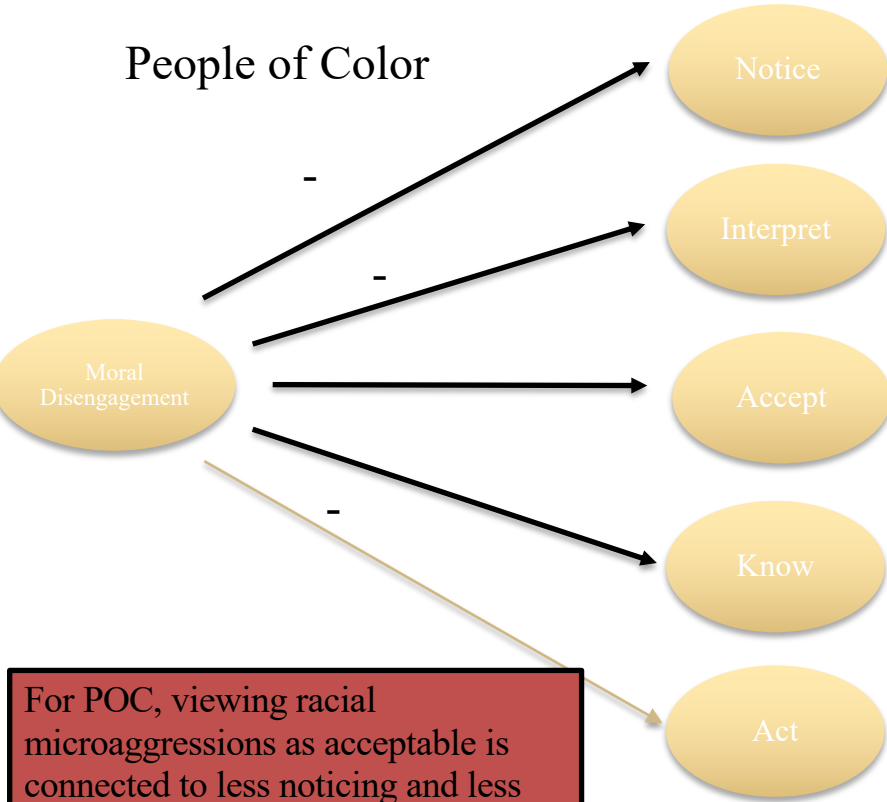Know
Act

Moral Disengagement
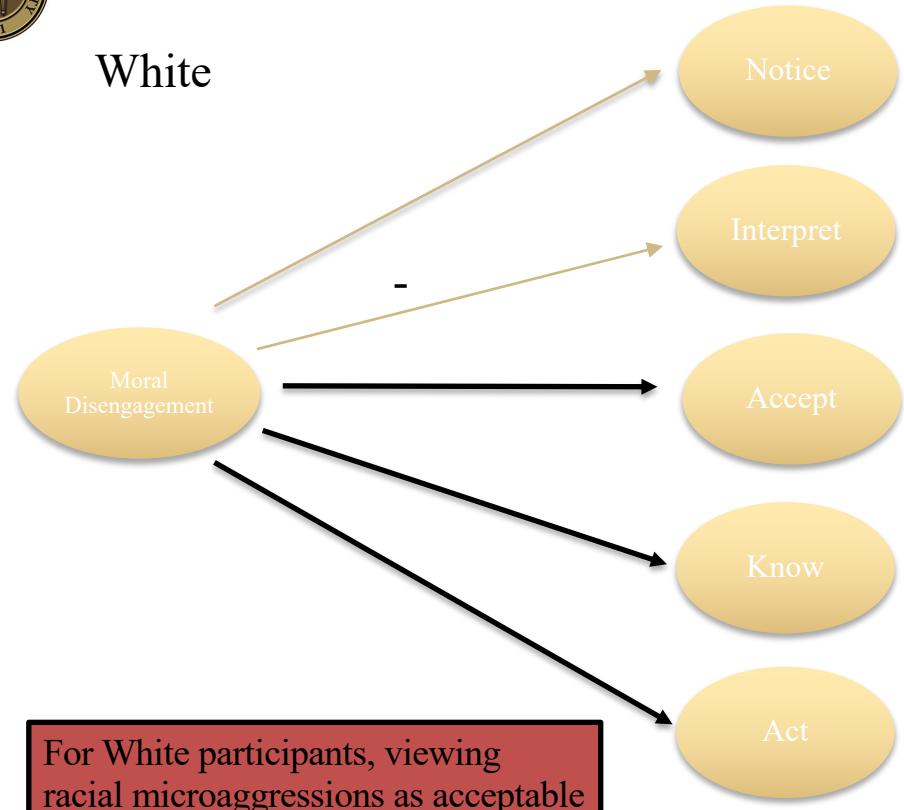
For POC, viewing racial microaggressions as acceptable is connected to less noticing and less likely to interpret them as a problem, but more likely to accept responsibility and know what to do.

For White participants, viewing racial microaggressions as acceptable is connected to higher sense of responsibility, knowing what to do, and acting.

Quantitative Results Summary

- Each step related to next (i.e., proof of concept) -- similar to bullying literature

- Self-efficacy really important!!

- Empathy less important.

- Somewhat confusing result regarding moral disengagement.

Self-Efficacy seems key to promoting bystander intervention!!

Path to providing help

EVENT

NOTICE
something is happening

INTERPRET
event as needing help

ACCEPT
responsibility for helping

KNOW
how to help

HELP

Obstacles to helping

Audience Inhibition
Costs exceed Rewards

Lack of competence

Diffusion of responsibility

Ambiguity
Pluralistic ignorance

Distraction
Self-concerns

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Why did you intervene when you witnessed a racial microaggression?

- "I was on good terms with both parties so it wasn't so hard to intervene."
- "I am not too sure, I was just angry and wanted to help."
- "I do not like injustices and I did not feel comfortable staying without doing anything."
- "I intervened because it's wrong and they were talking about my friend."

Why did you not intervene when you witnessed a racial microaggression?

- "Fear of retaliation and being bullied themselves. And fear of losing social status."
- "I was nervous about intervening."
- "Scared."
- "I didn't intervene for fear of suffering further reprisals."

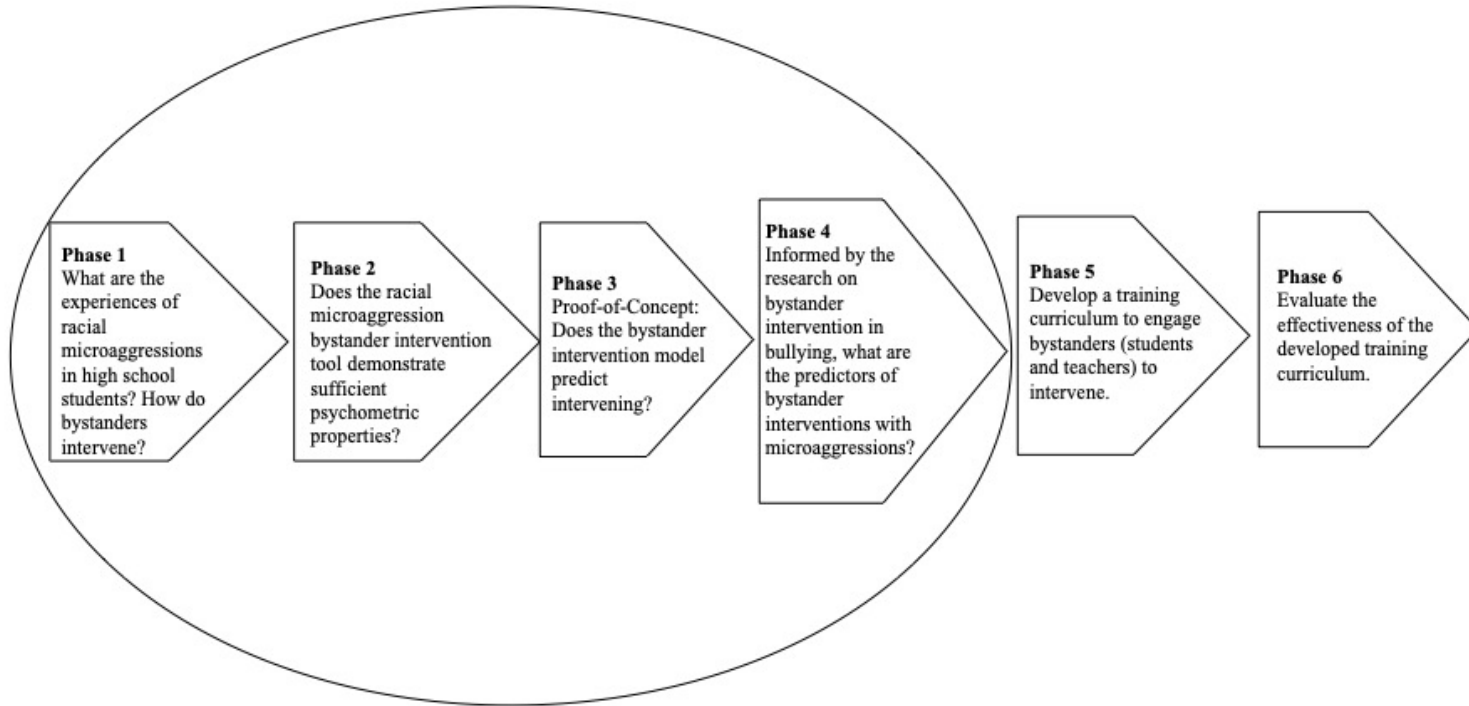# Implications

- Awareness and sensitivity to microaggressions is key to getting the 5-step process started.

- BLM movement has pushed for greater awareness, so this is a good time to act.

- Cannot assume students can identify racial microaggressions. They need to be taught.

- Promote self-efficacy.

- Build a culture of bystander intervention so individuals feel socially responsible to act!

Next Steps

- Conduct focus groups to add an additional layer of understanding to our results.

- Disentangle more the impact of race (or perpetrator and target) – Consider intersectionality.

- Compare on-campus recruitment to MTurk recruitment.

- Develop a training curriculum designed to teach students about microaggressions (i.e., what they look like) and how to intervene (i.e., culture development).

Phase 1
What are the experiences of racial microaggressions in high school students? How do bystanders intervene?

Phase 2
Does the racial microaggression bystander intervention tool demonstrate sufficient psychometric properties?

Phase 3
Proof-of-Concept: Does the bystander intervention model predict intervening?

Phase 4
Informed by the research on bystander intervention in bullying, what are the predictors of bystander interventions with microaggressions?

Phase 5
Develop a training curriculum to engage bystanders (students and teachers) to intervene.

Phase 6
Evaluate the effectiveness of the developed training curriculum.

Next Steps after our complete of Phases 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Thank You*

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*References available upon request.