White American Students' Recognition of Racial Microaggressions in Higher Education

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Abstract

Racial microaggressions often occur in U.S. higher education. However, less is known about how White American students reason about their evaluations of racial microaggressions. The current study investigated how 213 White college students (54.46% cisgender women) attending a PWI in the Southeast U.S. in the Fall of 2019 justified their evaluations of the acceptability of racial microaggressions presented in vignettes. Following Social Domain Theory, to assess participants' social reasoning, we conducted quantitative content analysis of participants' open-ended justifications for their evaluations. Multiple regression analyses revealed that participants were less likely to evaluate racial microaggressions as negative the more they employed justifications focused on 1) assuming that the behaviors in the situation followed conventions of the classroom, 2) judging the professor's response as correct, and 3) asserting that the behavior was likely to happen to anyone. Further, the higher participants' endorsement of color-blind attitudes the more likely they were to evaluate racial microaggressions as appropriate. However, reasoning centered on 1) assuming differential treatment based on race, 2) perceiving the behavior as harmful, and 3) considering the behavior was against conventional expectations was associated with finding racial microaggressions to be more negative. The current study highlights the value of investigating underlying reasoning behind evaluating racial microaggressions in addition to color-blind attitudes. The findings suggest that higher education professionals should consider interventions which pay particular attention to unpacking students' reasoning, untangling acceptance of Ethnocentric narratives and providing information that challenges classroom behaviors that, while potentially appearing conventional, in fact perpetuate harm through microaggressions.

Keywords

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Despite the continued prevalence and pernicious effects of everyday racism in the US, many individuals, such as those belonging to racially majoritized and privileged groups, are less aware of the reality of racism, especially if its manifestation can be considered ambiguous (i.e., the discriminatory message or behavior can be interpreted to be due to other reasons; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Nelson et al., 2012). On one hand, the scholarship has provided abundant evidence that racial and ethnic minoritized individuals report frequent experiences of everyday subtle behaviors that communicate negative and/ or hostile messages towards a group or individual (Nadal et al., 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007), also called microaggressions (Pierce et al., 1978; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). On the other hand, scholars have also noted that majoritized and dominant groups may not perceive such behaviors as discriminatory (Lithinfeld, 2007; Sue et al., 2008a; Tynes & Markoe, 2010). Differences in perceptions, and the related rationalizations that White individuals may hold in making sense of racial discrimination directly contributes to minimizing and negating the realities of racial harm experienced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals (Sue et al., 2008a). Therefore, many times BIPOC may find themselves doubly harmed, first by the microaggression they initially experienced, and then secondly, by the negation of the reality and harm they experienced (Sue et al., 2009). The aim of the current study was, thus, to examine White individuals' reasoning about racial microaggressions in higher education settings in order to provide insight into how and when White students are able and unable to recognize the negative nature of racial microaggressions.

Considering that racial microaggressions in higher education are frequent (McCabe, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015) and particularly pernicious (Lui, 2020; Nadal et al., 2014), and that in such social contexts, there are often majoritized student bystanders (particularly in Primarily White Institutions), there is a need to investigate how White students perceive and reason about the occurrence of such behaviors. Extending research on racial microaggressions to investigating what students attend to when making the judgment that a racial microaggression has occurred is both important for understanding the assumptions that individuals are making, as well as for developing educational interventions that take into account how individuals reason about racial microaggressions. Understanding what rationalizations contribute to perceiving or not perceiving racial microaggressions can inform the development of educational interventions aimed at encouraging bystander intervention to reduce racial microaggressions. This is especially important as recognition and awareness of the harm caused by racist behaviors is an enabler of bystander engagement (Nelson et al., 2011). Therefore there is a continued need to understand how, in majoritized White spaces, White individuals perceive racial microaggressions and differences in rationalizations that may contribute to such perceptions. Ultimately, by understanding what reasons contribute to seeing or not seeing a racial microaggression, we can take a step closer to addressing ideologies of white supremacy which contribute to racial microaggressions, and ultimately to perpetuating racism at all levels (Pérez Huber & Solorazano, 2015).

The current study investigated both attitudes and reasoning around racial microaggressions. Specifically, White American college students attending a Primarily White Institution (PWI) were asked to complete measures assessing their color-blind attitudes as well as provided justifications for their evaluations (i.e., judgment that the behavior is biased and

inappropriate) of racial microaggressions presented in vignettes. Prior research in this area has primarily examined associations between White students' color-blind attitudes (measured through CoBRAS; Neville et al., 2013; 2000) and their evaluations of racial microaggressions (e.g., Mekawi & Todd, 2018; Tynes & Markoe, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013). Findings from these studies have led to calls for interventions geared at addressing color-blind attitudes (e.g., Tynes & Markoe, 2010). The current study replicates and extends this prior work, by also examining students' reasoning (their justifications) about racial microaggressions. In the present study, we aimed to contribute to the literature and gain a fuller account of what factors may account for White college students' evaluations of racial microaggressions by investigating the role of both their color-blind attitudes and their justifications for evaluating the acceptability of racial microaggressions.

Theoretical Framework

Social Domain Theorists (SDT, Smetana et al., 2014) who study individuals' evaluations of social issues (see below for more details), including exclusion based on race (e.g., Burkholder et al, 2021; Killen & Stangor, 2001), have consistently highlighted that, without investigating how individuals justify their evaluations (their reasoning), we are left without a full account of what factors were considered to generate their evaluation (Dahl et al., 2018; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021; Turiel, Chung & Carr, 2016). Therefore, SDT scholars often assess individuals' reasoning through quantitative content analysis of participants' open-ended responses to the question of why they evaluated the situation the way they did (e.g., Burkholder et al, 2021; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021; Mulvey et al., 2016). Quantitative content analysis allows for the coding of the frequency of the types of messages present in participants' open-ended responses followed by statistical analysis such as that of predictive regressions (Neundorft, 2018).

According to SDT, when making judgments about socially complex situations, individuals reason in complex ways: they can take into account moral considerations (i.e., is someone being harmed?), conventional considerations (i.e., is this part of how society or the classroom is run?), and personal considerations (i.e., is this up to individual preference?). Specifically, findings suggest that individuals weigh these different domains when making social judgments, at times prioritizing one domain over another and at times coordinating their reasoning between different domains (Smetana et al., 2014; Turiel, 1983). For example, an individual who observes a microaggression may judge that it is unacceptable by recognizing that this behavior causes harm to the targeted individual, acknowledging that the target may feel sad to be treated in this way. Another individual may justify a microaggression, for instance referencing traditionally established conventions (such as accepting an Eurocentric and Ethnocentric teaching of the curriculum because that is the way that courses in the past have been taught). Finally, an individual may overlook a microaggression as an issue of personal choice, reasoning that individuals have the right to decide how they act or what they say to others.

A recent extension of social domain theory, the Social Reasoning Development (SRD) perspective posits that one's social identity in a particular context may also shape whether they prioritize moral concerns over conventional or personal choice concerns (Rutland et

al., 2010). The SRD perspective argues that prejudice may emerge in situations where one prioritizes their group membership, for instance, their racial group (Rutland & Killen, 2015). Thus, understanding if individuals focus their reasoning on moral issues, or prioritize conventions or personal choice when making judgments about and evaluating microaggressions will provide critical new insight into why individuals do not always recognize microaggressions that occur and why they may choose not to speak up if they observe such behaviors.

Racial Microaggressions on College Campuses

Prior scholarship has shown that racial microaggressions on college campuses are particularly pernicious in influencing Students of Color's well-being, experiences, and opportunities to achieve in higher education (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; Lui, 2020; McCabe, 2009; Mills, 2019; Nadal et al., 2014; Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Solórzano et al., 2000). Prior scholarship has found that several types of racial microaggressions, such as: 1) microinvalidations (messages that dismiss or exclude the feelings, thoughts, and experiential reality of a racial-ethnic group), color-blindness or denial of individual racism; 2) microinsults (rude or demeaning messages about a person's racial-ethnic background); and 3) ascriptions of intelligence or assumptions of criminality (Sue et al., 2007; Torino et al., 2019), are frequent occurrences in higher education and are associated with students' lower well-being (e.g., Nadal et al., 2014). For instance, Solórzano et al. (2000), found that in PWIs racial microaggressions, such as being made invisible in the curriculum and assumptions of being a criminal while walking on campus, negatively influence campus racial climate, leading to African American students reporting feeling self-doubt, isolation, and frustration. Further, these microaggressions also impacted African American students' academic performance, such as influencing their decision to drop a class, change their major, or even leave their current university (Solórzano et al., 2000). Similarly, Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) found that African American undergraduates reported that faculty were the primary perpetrators of racial microaggressions in the classroom, and that their microaggressive behaviors included assuming intellectual inferiority or low motivation to succeed based on race. Such assumptions influenced faculty's encouragement (and discouragement) of African American students' pursuing advanced degrees or pursuing certain majors, behaviors which were directly detrimental to students academic and career success. However, these microaggressions are not occurring in a vacuum. There are likely frequently bystanders present who could speak up and defend the victim or stop the microaggressive behavior. What is still unknown, though, is how students who observe these microaggressions reason about them. Therefore, considering the harmful effects of these types of racial microaggressions on Students of Color's well-being and the overall campus racial climate in PWIs, it is important to investigate how White students in these same spaces, come to learn to recognize (and eventually challenge) the occurrence of such behaviors.

Racial microaggressions in higher education also have implications for not only racial-ethnic minoritized individuals in these spaces, but also for majoritized and privileged individuals. For instance, prior scholarship on racial microaggressions has found that Black undergraduates at a PWI report that there is a cultural bias in the curriculum, including

the practice that the majority of courses are Eurocentric (Mills, 2019). The teaching of a Eurocentric perspective is not only othering (i.e., sending the message that other groups are different and are less than; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), and dismisses the experiences and histories of the majority of cultural communities, but also directly contributes to maintaining the ideology of White supremacy and protects White students from having their White supremacist beliefs from being attacked (Brunsma et al., 2013). Brusnma et al. (2013) suggest that "Therefore, most white students emerge from college with their walls of whiteness essentially unchallenged, unscathed, and, often, strengthened" (p.718). Unchallenged then, the occurrence of racial microaggressions in college spaces, serve not only as a source of harm to Students of Color's well-being (e.g., Nadal et al., 2014), but also teach White students lessons on white supremacist beliefs.

White Students Perceptions of Racism, Racial Microaggressions, and Color-blindness

As suggested above, prior scholarship has found that White American college students tend to be less aware of racism and racial microaggressive behaviors (e.g., Ancis et al., 2000; Awad et al., 2005; Neville et al., 2000; Tynes & Markoe, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013). One primary method by which college students' awareness of racism has been investigated is through the framework of color-blind racial ideology (Neville et al., 2013; 2000). Many studies employing the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS; Neville et al., 2000), have shown that individuals can avoid acknowledging that racism exists and employ several legitimizing ideologies that deny blatant racial issues (e.g., acknowledging that racism is an issue today), institutional racism (e.g., acknowledging institutional levels of racism), and the existence of White privilege (e.g., acknowledging advantages as a result of being White; Neville et al., 2000; 2013). Prior research has shown that White American college students are more likely to endorse these ideologies and therefore have on average higher color-blind attitude scores than other racial and ethnic minoritized students (Awad et al., 2005; Neville et al., 2000; Torres et al., 2020; Tynes & Markoe, 2010).

Racial color-blindness has been associated with reporting a greater likelihood of committing a racial microaggression (Kanter et al., 2017). Tynes & Markoe (2010) found that White college students and those who had high endorsement of racial color-blindness (CoBRAS) were less bothered by online racial discrimination as presented through racial themed party photos presented on social media. Mekawi and Todd (2018) found that considering racial microaggressions acceptable was positively associated with color-blindness. Similarly, Zou and Dickter (2013) found that White college students with high endorsement of color-blindness were more critical and negative of a target's confrontation of an ambiguous racial microaggression in a vignette. Moreover, Torres et al. (2020) found that undergraduate participants (75% White American) were significantly more likely to identify a more overt discriminatory situation ("Shouldn't you people know how to read English? This is America.") rather than an ethnic microaggression ("Wow you're pretty far back. Is English your fist language?") as unfair and due to differential treatment based on ethnicity. That is, individuals may find it harder to identify behaviors as discriminatory if the form of the discrimination is less overt and blatant (i.e., the assumed grouping of the individual and

the assumed inferiority is not explicitly mentioned). Therefore, prior research suggests that endorsement of color-blind attitudes may be associated with overlooking or dismissing racial microaggressions.

At the same time, White undergraduates have also been shown to recognize and observe racial microaggressions (Midgette & Mulvey, 2021; Kanter, 2017; Mekawi & Todd, 2018). For instance, Kanter (2017) found that 82% White Canadian undergraduate students report observing racial and ethnic microaggressions, including those enacted by their classmates. Moreover, Mekawi and Todd (2018) found that White college students did recognize racial microaggressions and considered them unacceptable to say, although White students were more likely than non-White students to consider some types of racial microaggressions acceptable. Moreover, Torres et al. (2020) suggest that, "the inability to identify and acknowledge ethnic microaggressions is likely to contribute to an adverse campus climate "(p.159). Therefore, given that White students can recognize and consider racial microaggressions as unacceptable, but are more likely to consider them acceptable than Students of Color, and thus may contribute to an adverse campus climate, there is a need to investigate what contributes to variability in White students' evaluations of the acceptability of the occurrence of racial microaggressions.

Gender Differences

While findings certainly suggest the importance of focusing on color-blind attitudes, findings also note that men and women may approach race in different and important ways. Critically, significant gender differences have been found in White college students' color-blind attitudes and acceptance of racial microaggressions. Several studies have found that White women college students tend to score lower in color-blind racial attitudes than their male counterparts (Mekawi et al., 2017; Neville et al., 2014; Torress et al., 2020; Yi et al., 2019). Similarly, Midgette and Mulvey (2021) found that women (in a primarily White sample attending a PWI) had greater awareness of racial microaggressions than men. Moreover, Mekawi and Todd (2018) found that White male undergraduate students were more likely to consider racial microaggressions acceptable than women. Together recent research suggests that White men are not only less likely to be aware of racism and the prevalence of experiences of racial microaggressions, but also are more likely to find racial microaggressions acceptable. Therefore prior research suggests that above and beyond social attitudes, gender may play an important role in influencing evaluations of racial microaggressions.

Bringing an SDT Lens to Racial Microaggressions: The Role of Reasoning

The current study aims to extend prior research on microaggressions by explicitly attending to both judgments and reasoning, in line with social domain theory approaches to understanding social decisions (Smetana et al., 2014; Turiel, 1983). The need to focus on reasoning is spotlighted by research showing within-group variation in White American students' relationship to racism and White privilege: prior qualitative research found that, independent of their color-blind attitudes, White college students still reported statements that included denial of racism and White privilege (Spanierman et al., 2008). Based on their

findings, the authors noted the importance of using a variety of methods to gain a fuller account of how Whites individuals respond to racism (Spanierman et al., 2008). Therefore, there is a need to employ methods that can capture what explanations White students give for recognizing and considering racial microaggressions unacceptable in conjunction (or addition to) with their social attitudes.

Although to our knowledge, prior scholarship has not directly investigated majoritized individuals' underlying reasoning in-depth (i.e., beyond positive and negative response) following observation of a racial microaggression, prior scholarship has suggested several possible justifications for perceiving or not perceiving a racial microaggression. For instance, Sue et al. (2008b), note that Black graduate students report interpreting behaviors to be microaggressive when they include messages that the person doesn't belong, that they are abnormal, that they are intellectually inferior, they are untrustworthy, or assumption that all are individuals from a group are the same. On the other hand, Lilienfeld (2017), when critiquing microaggression research, argues that actions that have been labeled as microaggressive can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In response to Lilienfield (2017), Williams (2020) found that both Black students and White students (comparing to Kanter et al.'s (2017) finding), reported perceiving the microaggressive behaviors racist. However, the study did not investigate participants' reasoning and underlying interpretations for their perceptions. Therefore, to both understand what interpretations foster recognition of the harm caused by microaggressive behaviors, and which interpretations may lead one to overlook microaggressions, there is a need for an investigation into underlying justifications for evaluations of racial microaggressions.

The Present Study

Prior research has consistently shown that racial microaggressions frequently occur in U.S. higher education settings. However, less is known about White American students' underlying reasoning behind their evaluations of the occurrence of racial microaggressions. Investigating underlying reasoning behind evaluations of whether a microaggression has occurred can provide needed insight into the types of assumptions and understandings that contributes to White students being critical of White supremacist practices in higher education. Moreover, although color-blind attitudes have been shown to be linked with a greater likelihood of considering racial microaggressions acceptable (Mekawi & Todd, 2018; Tynes & Markoe, 2010), prior scholarship has also shown that open-ended responses provide additional insight into acceptance of racial discrimination beyond what is captured by color-blind attitudes alone (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Spanierman et al., 2008). Therefore, in the current study we investigated White college students' attending a PWI evaluations of racial microaggressions (negativity and realism ratings), their underlying justifications for their evaluations, and whether certain types of justification use, in addition to their color-blind attitudes and gender was associated with their evaluations.

The present study had the following hypotheses:

1) Based on prior research that found variation in White students' recognition and evaluation of racial microaggressions and discriminatory events (Kanter, 2017; Mekawi & Todd,

2018; Torress et al., 2020), we expected to document variation in students' evaluations of the vignettes, with some students unable to recognize microaggressions as both realistic (i.e., this is something that happens in real-life) and negative (i.e., this is biased and inappropriate), and with some scenarios being considered as more ambiguous than others (Torress et al., 2020).

H2) Based on SDT, we expected that students would reason about microaggressions using justifications that would fall under the moral, conventional, and personal domains (Smetana et al., 2014; Turiel, 1983). However, we left as exploratory which type of justification would be used most frequently.

H3) Based on prior research documenting that color-blind attitudes and gender (Mekawi & Todd, 2018) are associated with White students' judgments of microaggressions, as well as prior research that documents that reasoning about race-based aggression is associated with judgments of how acceptable or problematic that behavior is (Mulvey et al., 2016), we expected that participants who used more moral reasoning, as well as those with lower endorsement of color-blind attitudes and females would be more likely to evaluate racial microaggressions as negative than those who use other reasoning, those who score higher on color-blind attitudes and male participants.

Method

Analysis of power, through Webpower, revealed that a sample of 200 was sufficient to test our hypothesis with the most factors (Zhang & Yuan, 2018). In particular, a sample of 200 would allow for us to test a linear regression with seven predictors, with a $f = .10$, $\alpha = .05$, and a power of .91.

Participants

A total of 213 White American college students from a PWI that is a public university located in the Southeastern US participated in the current study. A little over half of participants (54.4%) identified as cisgender women, and the remainder identified as cisgender men. The average participant age was 19.1 ($SD = 1.4$, range 18–31). Most participants (91%) identified as heterosexual, 5.6% identified as bisexual, 1.4% identified as homosexual, 1.4% preferred not to say how they identified, and 0.47% identified as pansexual. The majority of participants (94.4%) reported being born and living their entire life in the US, 3.2% reported living in the US between 7–21 years, and 2.3% reported living in the US for 3 years or less. A little less than half of participants (46.9%) were first year college students, 34.7% were sophomores, 12.2% were juniors, and the remaining 6.1% of participants reported being in their fourth year or higher of higher education.

Data Collection & Recruitment

Participants were recruited as part of a larger study investigating college students' experiences and attitudes towards race and gender-based microaggressions (See Midgette & Mulvey, 2021). Participants were recruited Fall of 2019 from a large public Southeastern PWI using the psychology department undergraduate subject pool. The institution where participants were recruited has a Carnegie classification as a Very High Research Activity

and serves over 35,000 students (approximately 80% in-state students). Following standards set by the North Carolina State University's IRB, participant were asked and provided informed consent (IRB Protocol # 20347). Participants were asked to complete a series of measures through a Qualtrics survey for course credit. The order of the measures and the vignettes was randomized.

Measures

Demographics—Participants completed a demographic questionnaire that included open-ended questions regarding participants' race and ethnicity, gender, age, year of study, sexuality, and years living in the U.S.

Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)—Color-blind ideology was measured employing the widely administered Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville et al., 2000). CoBRAS consists of 20-items measuring unawareness of racism and has three sub-scales: blatant racial issues (e.g., "Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations", 6 items), institutional discrimination (e.g., "Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people", 7 items), and racial privilege (e.g., "Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.", 7 items). Each item includes a range of agreement choices: 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). A score is calculated for each subscale, in addition to a total score across subscale. In the present study, the Chronbach's α for the total scale was .89, and for each susbscale: blatant racial issues α = .83, institutional discrimination α = .74, and racial privilege α = .85.

Vignettes—To assess participant evaluation and interpretation/reasoning of racial microaggressions, we presented participants with five vignettes (See Appendix A for each vignette in detail). Several studies have investigated student perception of racial microaggressions through vignettes (e.g., Boysen, 2012; Hughey et al., 2017), which are particularly useful as this method allows for controlling situational factors, what participants are exposed to and attend to, as well as avoids direct exposure to racial microaggressions (Hughey et al., 2017). In the present study we presented the following vignettes involving faculty engagement in racial microaggressive behaviors: 1) Invalidation & Ethnocentric vignette adapted from Hughey et al.'s (2017), where a faculty member teaching the history of psychology does not mention the contributions of other cultures to psychology, and tells a Student of Color to calm down when they express their concern about this ethnocentric perspective; 2) Assumption of Criminality vignette adapted from the experiences reported by participants in Solorzano et al.'s (2000), where a professor implies that a Student of Color would steal their purse; 3) Assumption of Inferiority was also a vignette adapted from the experiences reported by participants in Solorzano et al.'s (2000), where a Student of Color was discouraged from doing pre-med; and 4) Assumption of Economic Privilege was developed by our research team to investigate whether participants would be more sensitive to a situation where a professor assumes that a White student doesn't need financial aid. Finally, we also included a 5) Neutral Discussion vignette which was developed by our research team to serve as a neutral comparison to the other vignettes, and described an

event where students are discussion and event about climate change and the professor asks a Student of Color to share their perspective with the class.

Following Boysen's (2012) methodology, participants were asked to rate their evaluations of each vignette using a bipolar adjective scale (1-*very much*, to 7-*very much*) for how unbiased-biased and appropriate-inappropriate they considered each situation. A negativity score was calculated combining the two items (Boysen, 2012). In addition, considering the denial of the racial reality of minoritized individuals that has been noted in the literature (Sue et al., 2008), on the same bipolar adjective scale, participants were asked to rate how realistic they found each vignette.

Reasoning—To investigate underlying justification use for their ratings, participants were asked to give open-ended responses and explain why they rated the situation they way they did after each vignette. Following social domain theoretical methods for analyzing reasoning about social issues (e.g., Smetana et al., 2014; Turiel, 2002), we developed a coding scheme based on SDT domains and adapted to participant justifications (See Appendix B for coding scheme). The coding scheme, which included justification use (e.g., the situation was biased because it was offensive), and inequality recognition (recognition of discrimination), was tested and established based on 25% of the data with a team of coders, and any disagreements were discussed. Then 25% of the responses were coded to establish interrater reliability. Coder reliability for justification agreement $\kappa = .86-.91$, and inequality recognition $\kappa = .83-.90$. Following interrater reliability, all disagreements were addressed through discussion, and a final code was given. The remainder of the data were coded by the coding team. The team met regularly to address possible rater drift.

Data Analytic Plan

To test our first hypothesis, we ran two separate repeated-measures ANOVAS on realistic and negativity ratings across the five vignettes. To test our second hypothesis, following SDT methodology (Wainryb et al., 2001), we examined proportional use of each justification type, then ran repeated-measures ANOVAS of the top three justification types across the five vignettes. Finally, to test our third hypothesis, we ran multiple regressions for each scenario on negativity ratings as predicted by gender, color-blind attitude subscales, and the top three justification types for the negativity rating for each vignette.

Results

Ratings

Realism—In order to assess if participant ratings of how realistic the scenarios were varied based on the scenario, a 5 factor (Story: Invalidation & Ethnocentrism, Assumption of Criminality, Assumption of Inferiority, Assumption of Economic Privilege, Neutral) repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted on recognition of racial microaggressive vignettes' realism. Findings revealed a significant main effect for story, $F(4, 847) = 154.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .42$. Posthoc Bonferroni pairwise comparison revealed that, other than Assumption of Inferiority and Invalidation and Ethnocentrism vignettes ($p = .28$), all vignettes significantly differed from each other (See Table 1). Specifically, participants rated

the Assumption of Privilege vignette as less realistic than the Assumption of Criminality vignette ($p = .002$). All other vignettes significantly differed from each other with $ps < .001$, with participants identifying the neutral vignette as most realistic, followed by the Invalidation and Ethnocentrism vignette and the Assumptions of Inferiority vignette, the Assumptions of Criminality vignette and finally the Assumptions of Privilege vignette.

Negativity—Similarly, repeated-measures ANOVAs on negativity ratings across vignettes revealed significant differences, $F(4, 846) = 511.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .70$. Posthoc Bonferroni pairwise comparison revealed that negativity ratings across vignettes significantly differed from each other, (all $ps < .001$), except for the two vignettes Assumption of Criminality and Assumption of Privilege which did not significantly differ from each other in negativity ratings ($p = .07$). Specifically, participants rated the neutral scenario as least negative, followed by the Invalidation and Ethnocentrism scenario, the Assumption of Inferiority scenario, and the Assumption of Criminality and Assumption of Privilege scenarios.

Recognizing Race-based Inequality According to Open-Ended Responses

In order to assess whether participants differed in their recognition of racial inequality when they reasoned about their evaluations of the stories, a 5 (Story: Invalidation & Ethnocentrism, Assumption of Criminality, Assumption of Inferiority, Assumption of Economic Privilege, Neutral) repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted on recognition of racial inequality. Results revealed a main effect of story: $F(4, 207) = 179.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .46$. Mirroring ratings, only 15.3% ($M = .15$, $SD = .36$) of participants recognized the vignette on invalidation, as involving an issue of racial inequality. Similarly, only 28% ($M = .28$ $SD = .45$) of participants noted that the situation where the counselor assumed the student was inferior involved racial discrimination, while 1 participant said it only involved an issue of gender (i.e., the counselor said this because the student was a woman), and 1.8% ($n = 4$) participants recognized the situation as intersectional (i.e., the student was both a POC and a woman). On the other hand, for both the Assumption of Criminality (73.8%, $M = .74$, $SD = .44$) and the Assumption of Economic Privilege (75.1%, $M = .75$, $SD = .43$), the majority of participants justified their rating based on the assumption that the situation was as a result of race-based assumptions. The neutral situation was read as neutral, and only 2.8% ($M = .03$, $SD = .17$) of participants considered that the situation may also involve race-based assumptions (i.e., the teacher purposely picked on the student of color). Pairwise comparisons revealed that participants were significantly less likely to perceive racial inequality in the neutral story than in any other scenario (all $ps < .001$). Further, there were significantly more likely to perceive racial inequality in the Assumption of Criminality and the Assumption of Privilege scenarios than in the Invalidation and Ethnocentrism or Assumption of Inferiority scenarios ($ps < .001$). Finally, they were more likely to recognize racial inequality in the Assumption of Inferiority scenario than in the Invalidation and Ethnocentrism scenario ($p = .01$). There were no differences in perceptions for the Assumption of Criminality and Assumption of Privilege scenarios.

Reasoning about Vignettes

Repeated-measures ANOVA analysis of the top three justification usage for each vignette revealed significant differences (See Table 2 for the top justifications used). Use of

justifications for the Invalidation and Ethnocentrism vignette significantly differed, $F(2, 401) = 4.61$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Posthoc Bonferroni pairwise comparisons revealed that reasoning that the *message delivery is correct* (e.g., "The teacher answered the students question clearly and gave a solution to the problem.") was used significantly more frequently than reasoning that *situation follows convention* (e.g., "I thought it was appropriate as the teacher is allowed to teach stuff the way they want to." $p = .003$). No other significant differences were found.

The analysis for justification usage following negativity ratings of the Assumption of Criminality vignette, was significant, $F(2, 414) = 150.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .42$. Posthoc Bonferroni pairwise comparisons revealed that *differential treatment* (e.g., "She made a very racist comment because she is assumed that because the student was black, she would commit a crime such as stealing her purse") justification usage was significantly higher than *message delivery is problematic* (e.g., "It was very much inappropriate to make that comment, especially out loud;" "I think that protecting your valuables is a normal thing to do. It is more courteous and respectful to do it discretely and in this situation, she didn't have to say anything out loud") and *egalitarian* (e.g., "Not sure if they would say this about any student because you never know who would steal something on a college campus"; "the professor could have just noticed that anyone was waking by the her office and made her think that "oh anybody can just walk in there and steal something") justification usage ($ps > .001$). No other significant differences were found.

Reasoning for the Assumption of Inferiority vignette varied significantly, $F(2, 422) = 5.04$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Posthoc Bonferroni pairwise comparisons revealed that *against convention* (e.g., "A counselor shouldn't be telling someone they aren't able to do something") justification usage was significantly higher than *causing harm* (e.g., "It's inappropriate for any counselor to be discouraging a student from achieving their dreams;" "This is very inappropriate because the counselor should be someone the student can come to for positivity not to bring her down.") justification usage ($p = .004$). No other significant differences were found.

Findings revealed that use of the top three justifications for negativity ratings of the Assumption of Economic Privilege vignette, was significantly different, $F(2, 419) = 99.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .32$. Posthoc Bonferroni pairwise comparisons revealed that *differential treatment* (e.g., "It is inappropriate because the professor is basing a student financial situation off the color of their skin. It is also biased for the professor to assume that maybe because one white student is financially stable that they all are.") justification usage was significantly higher than justifying that the *content of the message was incorrect* (e.g., "The professor did not know the students circumstances.") and that *it is wrong to assume* (e.g., "very wrong you can't assume someone's financial status") (all $ps < .001$).

The analysis of justifications used for the neutral vignette revealed significant differences, $F(2, 417) = 305.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .59$. Posthoc Bonferroni pairwise comparisons revealed that justifications that the scenario *follows convention* (e.g., "This is a normal class discussion and the teacher isn't being inappropriate or biased to any of her students.") were significantly more likely to be used than *egalitarian* (e.g., "This is a reasonable and realistic

situation that has nothing to do with race.") and *no harm caused* (e.g., "an appropriate topic for class and no discrimination was made") justifications ($ps < .001$). Moreover, *egalitarian* justifications were used more frequently than *no harm* justifications ($p = .04$).

Predictors of Negativity Evaluations

In order to examine whether gender, colorblind attitudes and justification use predicted negativity judgments, multiple regression analyses were conducted for each scenario (See Table 3 for correlations between variables).

Invalidation and Ethnocentrism—For the Invalidation & Ethnocentrism scenario, the final regression, with gender, the subscales for colorblind attitudes (issues, privilege, institutional), and the top three justifications on negativity ratings was significant, $F(7, 193) = 11.97$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .30$. *Privilege* was significantly and negatively predictive of considering the situation biased, $B = -.05$, $SE = .01$, $t = -3.49$, $p < .001$, CI [−.09, −.02]. Higher use of two justifications, *message delivery is correct* (e.g., "This situation is pretty appropriate because the student disrupted class and the teacher was clarifying."), $B = -1.76$, SE = .27, $t = -6.42$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.30, −1.22], *and follows convention* (e.g., "If the course only covers certain topics than the student shouldn't be mad if a different topic isn't covered"; "I, personally, didn't see a problem with this scenario. If they are studying American Psychology, I understand why only American contributions were being discussed."), $B = -1.73$, $SE = .35$, $t = -4.85$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.44, −1.03], was associated with judging the situation to be less negative.

Assumption of Criminality—For the Assumptions of Criminality scenario, the final regression, with gender, the subscales for colorblind attitudes, and the top three justifications on negativity ratings was significant, $F(7, 200) = 11.48$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .28$. *Differential treatment* justification usage (e.g., "The professor made an assumption based on the student's color of their skin to go and lock their door."), $B = 1.08$, $SE = .19$, $t = 5.44$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [.68, 1.47], was positively associated with higher ratings of the situation as negative. On the other hand, *egalitarian* justification usage (e.g., "the professor could have just noticed that anyone was walking by her office and made her think that "oh anybody can just walk in there and steal something"") was negatively associated with considering the situation negatively, $B = -1.48$, $SE = .39$, $t = -3.72$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.27, −.69]. No other factors were predictive of negativity rating.

Assumption of Inferiority—For the Assumption of Inferiority scenario, the final regression, with gender, the subscales for colorblind attitudes, and the top three justifications on negativity ratings was significant, $F(7, 204) = 16.91$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .36$. *Different treatment* reasoning (e.g., "It also is inappropriate for them to tell them that because one can most certainly imply it is because of their race the student is being treated this way."), $B = 2.33$, $SE = .28$, $t = 8.09$, $p < .001$, 95%CI [1.76, 2.80], *causing harm* reasoning (e.g., "I believe that putting someone down like that regardless of skin color is inappropriate and offensive by someone who is supposed to be helping you."), $B = 1.81$, $SE = .40$, $t = 4.52$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.02, 2.60], and *against convention* reasoning (e.g., "This situation is a bit bleak regarding on how many classes the student was taking, but it was improper of the

counselor to discourage the student."), $B = 1.16$, $SE = .27$, $t = 4.23$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.62, 1.70], all positively predicted perceiving the situation negatively.

Assumption of Economic Privilege—For the Assumption of Economic Privilege scenario, the final regression, with gender, the subscales for colorblind attitudes, and the top three justifications on negativity ratings was significant, $F(7, 201) = 6.11$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .17$. *Blatant issues* was negatively predictive with finding the situation negative, $B = −.06$, $SE = .01$, $t = −4.36$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−.09, −.03]. On the other hand, *differential treatment* justification usage (e.g. "This is very unfair and biased to assume the white guy does not need a scholarship.") was positively associated with finding the situation negative, $B = .54$, $SE = .15$, $t = 3.59$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.24, .83].

Discussion

The present study investigated how White American college students evaluated and reasoned about racial microaggressions in higher education. Results revealed that students did not consistently recognize that instances of racial microaggressions were negative or that they involved racial inequality. Further, participants varied in their responses to how realistic they perceived the scenarios to be across vignettes. Finally, participants relied on different types of reasoning across scenarios, and different types of reasoning as well as color-blind attitudes were associated with participant evaluations. The current study contributes to the field by highlighting the value of investigating underlying reasoning (or interpretations) behind evaluating racial microaggressions in addition to colorblind attitudes. Moreover, the findings have implications for interventions and teaching practices within the classroom.

Ratings of Negativity and Recognition of Realism

Participants were less likely to find ethnocentric and Eurocentric teaching and invalidation of a student's perspective (Invalidation & Ethnocentrism) or discouraging a Student of Color from pursuing a medical career (Assumption of Inferiority) to be racially-based discrimination, and to negatively evaluate these situations, although they found these to be more realistic situations. On the other hand, participants were more likely to evaluate a situation in which a White student was assumed to be economically privileged (Assumption of Economic Privilege) and that a Student of Color was assumed to engage in criminal activity (Assumption of Criminality) was to be racially-based discrimination and to be both biased and inappropriate, but also were more likely to find these situations unrealistic. These findings are important, as they suggest both that White students may underestimate the occurrence of racial microaggressions and that they may not realize that racial microaggressions are occurring. Moreover, it is important to note that there may be some degree of ingroup bias (Brewer, 2007) at play as participants were more likely to recognize the scenario involving a microaggression targeting an ingroup member (Economic Privilege, which targeted a White student) as negative.

Recognition of Racial Inequality

In support of prior research (e.g., Torres et al., 2020), participants appeared to find some microaggressions as more directly involving issues of racial inequality than others. For

instance, only 15.31% of participants recognized that the Invalidation and Ethnocentrism vignette involved racial inequality. Similarly, only 28% of students recognized that the Assumptions of Inferiority scenario involved the counselor discouraging the student from pursuing a medical career because of assumptions related to the student's race. The majority of students are not recognizing these situations to be racial microaggressions, despite prior research that has shown these to be common practices reported by Students of Color within higher education (e.g., Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; Mills, 2019; Solórzano et al., 2000), consistent with the assertion that "white students emerge from college with their walls of whiteness essentially unchallenged" (Brunsma et al., 2013; p. 718).

Reasoning

Participants' justifications reflected a complex understanding of racial microaggressions. First, in the Neutral scenario, participants primarily noted that the scenario was conventional (follows conventions). This clarifies that participants' reasoning does reflect their understanding of the scenarios, as they also rated this scenario as not negative and highly realistic. Moreover, different types of reasoning were employed for each vignette. As found with the Neutral vignette, conventional reasoning was usually employed when participants evaluated a situation as acceptable, while moral reasoning was employed when participants perceived the situation negatively.

In terms of the Invalidation & Ethnocentrism vignette, participants focused heavily on message delivery, with references both to the correctness and problematic nature of the delivery of the professor's or student's behavior, as well as the conventional nature of the situation. Importantly, the fact that in their reasoning participants were accepting of Eurocentric and Ethnocentric teaching in a psychology classroom (e.g. "The way the professor addressed the students frustrated question was professional and well thought-out. I think it might be slightly biased because the student clearly didn't know they were specifically studying American psychology"), has significant implications for teaching in higher education. We would argue that Ethnocentric teaching of topics such as "American psychology" are in fact contributing to the "walls of whiteness" that Brunsma et al. (2013) note. Students' unchallenged assumption that a course topic is indeed race and ethnically neutral, contributed to their assessments that the situation was not invalidating. Instead, as presented in these examples, rather than being critical of the professor's teaching, students were more prone to be critical of the student of color's response (Zou & Dickter, 2013).

For the Assumptions of Criminality vignette, participants were centrally focused on differential treatment the scenario involved. Moreover, this recognition of differential treatment predicted negativity ratings, demonstrating the importance of reasoning in driving evaluations. This finding also has implications for higher education professionals: it is critically important that policies and campus practices are structured to ensure that students from different backgrounds feel welcomed on campus and that students from marginalized backgrounds are not differentially assumed to be transgressors. However, although participants did generally recognize this scenario as negative, those who reasoned by considering egalitarian thinking were less likely to recognize the scenario as negative. Thus, interventions aimed at helping students to recognize racial microaggressions on

campus could foster student awareness of how differential treatment impacts Students of Color, for instance by including personal stories of times Students of Color were assumed to be a threat on campus or made to feel unwelcome.

For the Assumptions of Inferiority scenario, participants focused their reasoning on understanding that the scenario went against conventions, that the counselor was treating the student differentially and that this treatment may cause the student harm. Generally, participants recognized that counselor should not be discouraging, but participants did not always understand or recognize the racial assumptions behind these behaviors. This has important implications for White students' socialization (Hagerman, 2014), as the findings suggest that it may be important for parents, educators and those invested in the positive development of young adults to encourage majoritized students to consider what role race may play in differential treatment of their minoritized peers. Moreover, this finding suggests that advisors, counselors and student affairs staff in higher educational settings might benefit from professional development focused on how to support student goals, without allowing assumptions based on the student's background or identity to shape what they think the student is capable of accomplishing.

For the Assumption of Economic Privilege scenario, participants were very likely to highlight concerns with differential treatment. They recognized that making assumptions about a White students' financial situation was problematic and use of Differential Treatment reasoning was associated with ratings of the scenario as negative. While participants may have had an easier time recognizing Differential Treatment of an ingroup member (a fellow White student), these findings highlight the importance of the recognition of differential treatment in shaping understand of microaggressions as negative (biased and unacceptable). Further, these findings suggest that interventions around microaggressions might utilize both examples that draw upon ingroup and outgroup peers' experiences in order to help students recognize the harm inherent in these behaviors.

Methodological Implications & the Importance of Reasoning

Our findings also point to important methodological implications for considering perceptions of racial microaggressions. As suggested by prior research (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Spanierman et al., 2008), coding of open-ended underlying reasoning revealed participants to be less critical or racial microaggressions that would be assumed from quantitative ratings and color-blind attitudes alone. In particular different forms of reasoning were associated with differences in negative evaluations of racial microaggressions. This is in line with social domain theory, which argues that social reasoning can provide greater insight into the underlying motives one has and the justifications for their evaluations or decisions in social situations (Turiel, 2006). Specifically, we found that, generally, if participants used more moral reasoning they were more likely to recognize the microaggressions as wrong. We also found complexity in their social reasoning about microaggressions, with participants recognizing both the role of conventions as well as the harm that these behaviors can cause. Moreover, color-blind attitudes were associated with negativity ratings for only two of the vignettes. The conventional nature of many of the practices in the classroom, and the specific manner

in which racial microaggressions operate in different situations, may require studies and interventions to go beyond only focusing on color-blind attitudes, to investigating reasoning and interpretations across various situations and to change behavior. These findings are in concert with a long line of research from a social domain perspective, which highlights the value of assessing not only judgments and evaluations, but also underlying reasoning to comprehensively understand how individuals navigate their social world (Dahl et al., 2018; Smetana et al., 2014).

Moreover, as participants differed across the scenarios in whether they recognized differential treatment based on race and harmful consequences of the behaviors, has implications for understanding how racial microaggressions are perceived and evaluated. We find it important that participants recognized race as a factor in the Assumption of Inferiority and Assumption of Economic Privilege, but not in the other microaggression scenarios. The majority of participants considered the treatment of the White student to be as a result of assumptions of racial privilege, rather than professor's knowledge of the student's financial circumstances. They were willing to 1) assume that only one White student was in the classroom, and 2) assume that the professor had no prior knowledge of their student. On the other hand, the majority of participants considered the discouragement that the counselor was giving the female Student of Color to be as a result of the counselor's knowledge of the difficulty of the subject, rather than assumptions of race and gender. When the situation was evaluated negatively, it was often because students' believed that counselors should not be discouraging, rather than recognizing the role that assumptions of race and gender played in their discouragement. These two scenarios reveal differences in the assumptions that White students bring to their interpretation of complex social scenarios involving racism.

Practical Implications

Our study's findings highlight how students are already learning to accept Ethnocentric narratives within the classroom. Our findings speak directly to the need for educators and other higher education professionals to consciously teach and frame their work in a racially and ethnically aware and equitable manner, so as to avoid that "stories about whites become universal stories about all of us" (i.e., being aware of racial grammar, Bonilla-Silva, 2012, p. 177). Practically, instructors should consider framing in all subject matters the racialized reality of their theories and subjects, to avoid contributing to unawareness of racial privilege for majoritized students, and to their reaction that racism is something they don't need to learn about (Rodriguez, 2009). In particular, often students' first introduction to a new field of thought, general introductory subjects should also consider contextualizing their subjects. For instance, rather than naming introductory courses "Psychology," departments might specify in the course descriptions, objectives and even course titles that the content centers on research conducted with primarily White participants from the US to bring the forefront what is often left unspoken. Moreover, when teaching such courses, faculty can directly address and counteract assumptions of what is important to learn, who is American and whose experiences were the focus of prior studies by not only presenting the findings but encouraging students to interrogate who was included (and who was left out) in foundational studies. In terms of institutional practice and policy, we would recommend making a critical thinking course that as aimed at understanding and breaking down racialized assumptions

within the curriculum (e.g., perhaps one offered by African American Studies, Ethnic Studies, etc. or a newly developed interdisciplinary course) a first year requirement for students and a central part of onboarding for new faculty and staff. In this manner, staff and students would be better equipped to evaluate not only specific instances, but overall narratives across disciplines that may be contributing to the types of justifications that lead to the acceptance of racial microaggressions and ultimately to a negative racial campus climate.

Our current findings also suggest the importance of providing information that challenge the acceptance of conventional behaviors in the classroom. Participants' reasoning reveals that they may not always have the knowledge to recognize or interpret situations as involving racism. This suggests that higher education educators, counselors, student affairs teams should consider interventions which promote recognizing the role that racism may play in instances of differential treatment and to explicitly train students to recognize the underlying assumptions and messages of everyday conventional seeming behaviors and link these assumptions with the harm that occurs because of microaggressions, so as to be empowered to intervene to support minoritized peers. As Sue et al. (2019) note, "bystanders cannot intervene when they are unable to recognize that a microaggression has occurred" (p.198). While bystander intervention programs are growing on college campus, and have proven highly effective, they are primarily focused on intervening to stop sexual harassment, sexual assault, and violence (Alegría-Flores et al., 2017; Coker et al., 2017; Coker et al., 2011; Fenton et al., 2016; Sundstrom et al., 2018). New interventions should be developed which attend to helping students to recognize racial microaggressions are occurring. In particular, focus should be placed on addressing situations that are not blatant, but rather allow for possible multiple interpretations. Examples of why non-blatant behaviors are racial microaggressions can be drawn from the various studies that have curated narratives provided by Students of Color regarding their experiences with microaggressions (e.g., Mills, 2019; Nadal et al., 2014). Together with an instructor or facilitator, students can discuss and reason through why these behaviors within the classroom can be microaggressive. Overall, our study suggests that recognizing that a racial microaggression has occurred and that it is a negative event, requires that students are given a means by which to question the seemingly conventional (i.e., everyday) nature of the situation, and the harmful and discriminatory consequences of such situations.

Limitations

While the current study provided an important insight into how racially majoritized college students at PWI perceive and reason about racial microaggressions in higher education, as the first study of its kind, it has several limitations. One, our study was limited to a White American sample of college students in a PWI in the Southeast of the USA collected in 2019. Future research should investigate changing social attitudes and reasoning across communities in the US, abroad, as well as consider comparing reasoning between different BIPOC and White students. Second, our study was limited to investigating reasoning and evaluations of vignettes. Future research should consider employing other methods to investigate underlying interpretations of racial microaggressions, such as following experimental situations as well as video recordings of real life microaggressions. Finally,

this study was limited to investigating open-ended reasoning in an online survey. Future research should consider employing more in-depth interview or narrative methods to gain greater insight into the reasons for why individuals may recognize and be critical of racial microaggressions.

Conclusion

The current study found that White American college students at a PWI employ a variety of justifications when evaluating racial microaggressions occurring in higher education settings. We found that participants were more critical of some vignettes than others, particularly those that are perceived to be part and parcel of regular conventional interactions in higher education (i.e., teaching ethnocentric perspectives of psychology or a discouraging guidance counselor). Moreover, we found that justification use that relied on normative expectations (i.e., conventional justifications of what is appropriate and/ or expected) were used both to be accepting of racial microaggressions as well as to critique racial microaggressions in a color-blind manner. However, more blatant racial microaggressions were both perceived to be racial microaggressions and were justified as such based on understandings of differential treatment (i.e., this is as a result of racial membership), and the harmful effects of the behavior. The current study's findings suggest the importance of investigating underlying interpretations of racial microaggressions, both as a methodology for understanding how racial microaggressions may pass by unnoticed by bystanders, and also for informing development of interventions that go beyond changing attitudes to changing understanding of social situations.

Acknowledgments

Appendix A: Vignettes

Invalidation & Ethnocentrism:

Standing before his classroom, Professor X, asked for questions from the class. He had just finished a lecture on GrecoRoman contributions to the history of psychology. A student of color raised their hand. When called upon, the student spoke in a frustrated manner, noting that the history of psychology was "ethnocentric and eurocentric" and that it left out the contributions of other societies and cultures. The student seemed to challenge the professor by noting that the contributions of African, Latin American, and Asian psychologies were never covered. The professor responded, " I want you to calm down. We are studying American psychology in this course and we will eventually address how it has influenced and been adapted to Asian and other societies. I plan to also talk about how systems and theories of psychology contain universal applications."

Assumption of Criminality:

A student of color was walking down the hallway in their department's building and one of the professor's door was open. After seeing the student pass her, the professor said out loud, "Oh, I should have locked the door. My purse is in there." She then went to the door and locked it.

Assumption of Inferiority:

A student of color decided to go see a counselor because she wanted to do pre-med and wanted to make sure that she was on the right track. The counselor was very discouraging. The counselor finally said to the student, "Well, I don't think that you should take all of those classes. You're not going to be able to do that."

Assumption of Economic Privilege:

Professor Z told his students that if they need help with paying for school fees, they could apply to a scholarship that the school had to help students pay their fees. He started handing out a sheet with the information for the scholarship to each student. However, he didn't hand out the sheet to a White student in the front row. As he passed the student, Professor Z said, " I am sure you won't be needing this scholarship."

Neutral:

Professor Y asks the class to quiet down as she enters the class. After everyone becomes quiet, the professor asks them to turn to a partner and discuss a current event. After five minutes the professor has students volunteer to share with the whole class. Professor Y points to a student of color and asks them to share what the student and their partner discussed. The student talks about the issue of climate change. Some of the classmates nod at what the student has to say.

Appendix B: Coding Scheme

INEQUALITY RECOGNITION

1. **Race:** suggests the behavior or situation had to do with race or racial discrimination. **Example:** "The professor in this scenario 100% is making assumptions based on race and ethnicity and that is inappropriate and offensive."

2. **Gender**: suggests the behavior or situation had to do with gender or gender-based discrimination. **Example:** "this is biased towards women."

3. **Can't tell:** does not see how race or gender has to do with the situation and/or suggests reasons other reasons. **Example:** "I do not think that the teacher was saying any of these things because of the persons color."

4. **Intersectional:** relates the situation to involving both issues of race and gender. **Example:** "it is discouraging women of color to become doctors."

REASONING:

Harm to Others: notes the negative effect that the situation would have on others. **Example:** "it is dismissive;" "derogatory;" "makes them uncomfortable."

    a. Doesn't cause harm. **Example:** " it doesn't hurt anyone."

    b. Does cause harm. **Example**: "it hurts their feelings."

Differential treatment: notes the individual is being treated in this manner because they belong to particular social category. **Example**: "If a white person were to make this comment, they more than likely would not have been told to calm down."

Invalidation: notes how certain ideas, contributions, or viewpoints are dismissed, ignored, or marginalized. **Example**: "The professor is choosing to skip over the contributions of POC."

Egalitarianism: notes that **everyone or anyone** is/should or shouldn't/ would be treated a certain way. **Example:** "They may have simply thought that the student (any student) could have gotten into the office."

    a. Everyone is or would be treated this way. The situation is not as a result of any group membership. **Example:** "This would happen to anyone"

    b. No one should be treated this way; everyone should be equal (egalitarian ideology)/ Membership shouldn't matter. **Example:** "The professor should treat people equally, no matter their skin color."

Message delivery: notes how things were said or done. **Example:** " the shouldn't have said it out loud."

    a. Delivery is fine/ response is appropriate: Example: " they said they will talk about it later on."

    b. Delivery/ procedure is problematic: " they shouldn't have said calm down and dodged the question"

Conventional justification: it fits with the way things are, or are expected in the functioning of the classroom, society, or culture. **Example:** "this was appropriate because in a class that focuses on American psychology."

    a. Follows conventions. **Example:** "this was appropriate for a classroom"

    b. Does not following the expectations. **Example:** "inappropriate for a teacher/ counselor to do this."

Other: Reasoning falling outside of those given above. **Example:** "well if the student was well known to the advisor, then.. but if not, then.."

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Table 1

Ratings of Vignettes Means (SD)

Vignette	Realism Score	Negativity Score
Invalidation & Ethnocentrism	3.05 (1.53)	3.82 (1.54)
Assumption of Criminality	4.24 (2.01)	6.12 (1.25)
Assumption of Inferiority	3.40 (1.69)	5.25 (1.51)
Assumption of Economic Privilege	4.78 (1.78)	6.45 (.84)
Neutral Discussion	1.53 (1.28)	1.87 (1.21)

Note. For both scales (1= very much (realistic/not negative); 4= neither; 7= very much (unrealistic/negative).

Table 2

Top 3 Justifications for Ratings of Vignettes

Vignette	Justification 1	Justification 2	Justification 3
Invalidation & Ethnocentrism	Message delivery is correct .24 (.37)	Message delivery is problematic .18 (.30)	Follows Convention .13 (.28)
Assumption of Criminality	Differential treatment .53 (.42)	Message delivery is problematic .07 (.19)	Egalitarian .06 (.20)
Assumption of Inferiority	Against Convention .20 (.31)	Differential treatment .17 (.30)	Causes harm .11 (.21)
Assumption of Economic Privilege	Differential treatment .50 (.41)	Wrong to assume .12 (.27)	Content is wrong .07 (.20)
Neutral Situation	Follows convention .69 (.38)	Egalitarian .10(.22)	No harm caused .03 (.13)

Note. Numbers are the proportion of justification use. In parenthesis is standard deviation.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix Negativity Scores and Color-blind Attitudes

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ethnocentrism & Invalidation	--							
Assumption of Criminality	.08	--						
Assumption of Inferiority	.17**	.31***	--					
Assumption of Economic Privilege	.11	.35***	.27***	--				
(Cobras) Blatant Scale	−.11	−.21**	−.28***	−.31***	--			
Privilege Scale	−.19**	−.09	−.27***	−.09	.59***	---		
Institutional Scale	−.02	−.16*	−.17**	−.08	.53***	.52***	---	
Female	.07	.07	.10	.12	−.19**	−.08	−.23***	--

Note. Scores correlated are vignette negativity ratings.

***
p<.001,

**
p<.01,

*
p<.05.