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Are We More Racist Than We Think? Recognition of Racism and Racial Microaggressions

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Are We More Racist Than We Think?: Recognition of Racism and Racial Microaggressions

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Abstract

Racism is discriminatory behavior rooted in history and fostered by institutional power. Current theory and research posits that different types of racism have developed over time, such as overt, implicit, symbolic, and aversive racism. The concept of racial microagressions has developed from these theories. Microaggressions are defined by Sue (2010) as subtle and commonplace environmental, verbal, and behavioral indignities that convey negative, hostile, or derogative slights toward people of color. This study examines the ability to recognize racism, as well as relationships between the ability to recognize racism and factors of White privilege awareness, attitudes toward diversity, and ability to empathize. A sample of 208 participants were assigned to one of three conditions with varying levels of implicit or overt racism portrayed via a video scenario, and were then asked to complete surveys designed to determine if participants labeled the events as offensive and/or as racist. Participants also completed surveys relating to White privilege awareness, attitudes toward diversity, and empathy. Contrary to the first hypothesis, results indicated participants better recognized the offensiveness of the racial microaggression than the offensiveness of the overt racist aggression. The second hypothesis was supported in that participants better recognized the overt racist event was offensive in comparison to those in the control condition. Furthermore, White privilege awareness and attitudes toward diversity were not related to the ability to recognize racism. However, ability to empathize was partially related to racism recognition in that it was related to the ability to label an event as racist. Limitations and future directions are discussed.

Are We More Racist Than We Think?: Recognition of Racism and Racial Microaggressions

Racism is discriminatory behavior which is informed by historical exploitation and backed by institutional power (Mio, Barker, & Tumambing, 2012; Cox, 1970). Old fashioned racism involves everything from racial epithets, to cross burning, to racially based murder (Zamudio & Rios, 2006), and has its roots before Europeans began settling in the Americas (Cox, 1970). Old fashioned racism also serves as a more prototypical schema for what today's society recognizes as discrimination (Marti, Bobier, & Baron, 2000). It is both more readily recognized, and in recent years more commonly dismissed, especially by the White population, as a "thing of the past" (Zamudio & Rios, 2006). While racial hatred has become socially unacceptable, the racial oppression that stems from it remains (Thompson & Neville, 1999; Sue 2010). Indeed, research suggests that racism has moved from more overt and obvious manifestations to more covert, implicit racism (McConahay & Hough, 1976; McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Zamudio & Rios, 2006; Sue 2010). Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan (1997) examined trends with regard to overt racism in the 35 years preceding their study, and found that there was, in fact, a remarkable decline. Furthermore, this decline was not only due to increased social pressure to change social norms about racism, but also due to legislative measures, such as the Civil Rights Act, which made certain types of discrimination stemming from overt racism illegal (Schuman et al., 1997).

Given this decline in overt racist behavior, it seems prudent to investigate how racism has changed in recent years. McConahay and Hough (1976) suggested their theory of modern racism referred to as symbolic racism, in which there is an underlying prejudice which is not directly or consciously recognized or acknowledged by those who hold it. This theory of modern racism has developed into the concept of aversive racism, wherein people openly voice support for and

consciously believe in tolerance and diversity, yet their behavior reveals underlying prejudice (McConahay, et al., 1981; Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009). More subtly and insidiously, the aversive racist discriminates in situations that allow him or her to maintain a positive self-view as non-prejudiced (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 1986). Zamudio and Rios (2006) explain that this more implicit type of racism also takes the form of colorblind racism. While ostensibly the same as aversive racism, colorblind racism is subtly different in that it works to deny the structural disadvantages of people of color, while at the same time obscuring the advantages that White people receive (Zamudio & Rio, 2006). Both colorblind racism and aversive racism work quite explicitly to deny the continued existence of racism while simultaneously perpetuating it (McConahay, et al. 1981; Pearson, et al., 2009; Zamudio & Rio, 2006).

The prevalence of both colorblind racism and aversive racism are further obscured by unacknowledged racial inequalities, such as White privilege. White privilege is defined as the unearned benefits that come from being White (McIntosh, 1998). McIntosh (1998) describes privilege as an invisible knapsack of special provisions or unearned assets of which one is often unaware or oblivious. Because the person who benefits from White privilege is often unaware of the positive influence and advantages it provides in his or her life, possession of privilege is often denied (McIntosh, 1998). For example, a White privilege holder might make a statement to the effect that any person regardless of color can hold the same position as a White person as long as that person is qualified (Todd & Abrams, 2010). Furthermore, White privilege holders are often unwilling to admit that they are over-privileged, even if they admit that other groups are disadvantaged (McIntosh, 1998). A White privilege holder might make statements about "equal playing fields" and meritocracy while failing to acknowledge the advantages that Whiteness provides (Todd & Abrams, 2010; Sue, 2011). The White privilege holder will

frequently assert that he or she is solely responsible for personal success, while remaining oblivious to the fact that simply being White affords him or her certain advantages (McIntosh 1998; Anderson & Middleton, 2011). The overall result of White privilege combined with the denial of its existence is continued oppression of people of color and the perpetuation of racism and racist attitudes (McIntosh, 1998; Anderson & Middleton, 2011).

One way in which the confluence of White privilege, aversive racism, and colorblind racism manifest themselves as subtle discrimination in everyday life is through racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010). Sue (2010) defined racial microaggressions as subtle and commonplace environmental, verbal, and behavioral indignities that convey negative, hostile, or derogative slights towards people of color. Furthermore, microaggressions may be intentionally perpetrated, but frequently are unintentional, and may perhaps be best understood as the manifestation of implicit or unconscious biases held by the person perpetrating them (Sue, 2010).

As a form of subtle discrimination, microaggressions have many different ways of being expressed; for instance, some examples of microaggressions include messages regarding color blindness, assumptions of criminality, ascriptions of intelligence, and denials of individual racism (Sue, 2010). Color blindness works to deny a person racial or ethnic experience and denies the individual as a racial or cultural being; a person expressing a miscroaggression of colorblindness might declare: “When I look at you, I don’t see color” or “There’s only one race, the human race” (Sue, 2010). Assumptions of criminality send the message to an individual that he or she is a criminal, is poor, is going to steal, and ultimately does not belong; microaggressions showing assumption of criminality might manifest in a White woman clutching her purse as a Black or a Latino individual approaches or passes, or a store owner following a customer of color around the store (Sue, 2010). Ascriptions of intelligence assign

intelligence to a person based on their gender or skin color; a person expressing microaggressions of ascription of intelligence might declare: “You’re a credit to your race” or “Wow! How did you get so smart?” (Sue, 2010). Denials of individual racism convey the message that the speaker considers him or herself immune to racism because of friendships with people of color and manifests in statements such as: “I’m not a racist I have several Black friends” (Sue, 2010).

Frequently, the implied insult conveyed through the microaggression is denied by the perpetrator of a microaggression. This denial of racism presents the recipients of microaggressions with a dilemma when responding to them, which typically leads to recipients reacting to microaggressions by doing nothing (Sue, 2010). Recipients of microaggressions choose to do nothing for many reasons: they may be left with ambiguity and wonder if the microaggression really occurred; they may be left with indecision and wonder what was the best way to respond; they may feel impotent and think responding will not do any good; or they may even fear the consequences of confronting the aggressor (Sue 2010). While the slights present in microaggressions may appear innocent and innocuous, over time they can contribute to great harm and stress for the recipients (Sue, 2010).

A hallmark of racial microaggresions is that the targeted individual is often left wondering whether or not they actually experienced racism (Sue, 2010). The doubt involved with experiencing microaggressions on a daily basis may in itself contribute to psychological harm to the physical and mental health of those who experience them (Sue, 2010; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). Furthermore, the slights and indignities experienced in microaggressions are not just an occasional event, but constant, continuing, and cumulative (Sue, 2010). Huynh, Devos, & Dunbar (2012) not only found that frequency of these discriminatory

events and stressfulness were correlated ($r = .40$), but that there was an interaction between perceived frequency of discrimination and perceived stressfulness of discrimination on aggregated psychological distress. These results indicate that higher frequency of low stress, discriminatory events (racial microaggressions) are associated with higher depression and anxiety (Huynh et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is a perception from White individuals that microaggressions cause only minimal harm, and that people who experience them are over-reacting when they protest such slights (Sue, 2010). However, consistent, everyday encounters with microaggressions are detrimental to recipients and result in not only harmful psychological consequences, but lead to low self-esteem, and divert energy from adaptive functioning and problem solving (Sue, 2010; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000).

Several recently published studies have also explicitly demonstrated the harmfulness of racial microaggressions. In one such study, Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennet, and Felicié (2013) found that the presence of racial microaggressions was a predictor for both depression and anxiety. Likewise, Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, and Rasmus (2014) found that individuals who experience racial microaggressions are likely to exhibit negative mental health symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, negative worldview, and lack of behavioral control. Also relevant was the finding that higher cumulative experience with racial microaggressions predicted depressive symptoms and one's affect (how positively or negatively one views the world), as well as the implication that cumulative experience with microaggressions might predict more mental health problems in general (Nadal, et al., 2014). In addition to findings that experiences of microaggressions are a common everyday occurrence, Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, and Sue (2013) found not only that individuals who experienced microaggressions also reported poorer psychological adjustment, but also that the unpleasant experience of one daily microaggression

often follows on the heels of another, thereby gradually increasing subsequent negative affect and somatic symptoms, thus indicating that the experience of these daily stressors exert continual influence on health and well-being (Ong, et al., 2013).

Furthermore, many studies have successfully demonstrated the harm inherent in experiencing racism in general (Carter, 2007). For instance, in a recent meta-analysis of 66 different studies, Pieterse, Todd, Neville, and Carter (2012) confirmed that greater perceived racism is associated with greater psychological distress in Black Americans. This indicates that negative impact on the mental health of Black Americans is related to exposure to racism, and there is a greater likelihood of reporting mental distress (Pieterse, et al., 2012). Still other studies have examined the negative effects of racism induced stress on hypertension (Din-Dzietham, Nembhard, Collins, & Davis, 2004), mental and physical health (Dohrenwend, 2000), and cardiovascular health (Guyll, Matthews, & Bromberg, 2001), as well as aspects of life such as academic performance (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000).

Given the inconspicuous and harmful nature of subtle racism, several researchers have conducted studies into what types of discrimination are most readily recognized. For instance, Marti et al.,(2000) examined perception of prototypical discrimination, such as old-fashioned racism, and non-prototypical forms of discrimination such as ableism, and found that overall participants were more likely to detect prototypical than non-prototypical forms of prejudice. This indicates that prototypical discrimination is perhaps the most well-known and therefore most readily recognized (Marti et al., 2000).

Additionally, Marti et al. (2000) discovered that the ability to detect prejudice was also influenced by priming. When participants were given priming instructions they were significantly more likely to detect prototypical than non-prototypical forms of prejudice. While

prejudice and discrimination are not the same, the two are related. For instance, Ziegert and Hanges (2005) found that implicit racist attitudes (prejudice) in interaction with a climate for racial bias predict the outcome of discrimination. Because of this relationship, it may perhaps indicate the role that awareness about the continued presence of racism plays in the ability to detect it.

Other researchers have investigated methods that help people recognize racism. Kernahan and Davis (2007) found that diversity courses increased students' use of the words "racism" or "racist" to describe racist events. Kernahan and Davis (2007) also found that students were more able to recognize that racism had occurred and that students also attempted to identify the type of racism. It seems reasonable to assume, based on this, that those with more knowledge about or tolerance for diversity might be better able to recognize racism. Additionally, Case (2007) found that diversity courses raise awareness of both White privilege and racism, indicating that there may, perhaps, be some relationship between these two factors.

Furthermore, Kernahan and Davis (2007) also found that students showed an increase in taking offense, or feeling upset or embarrassed for being treated differently than Black customers after taking a diversity course. This increase in emotional response to witnessing racism would seem to implicate the role that empathy may play in recognizing racism. There are not many studies that have thoroughly investigated empathy's role in recognizing racism. However, Ensari, Christian, Kuriyama and Miller (2012) found that among several other factors, empathy was the most effective component in reducing prejudice, and Zembylas (2012) recommends the use of strategic empathy as a key method to breaking down students' resistance to anti-racist work. This would seem to indicate that it may be the relationship between empathy and acknowledging or recognizing racism worth investigating. However, in spite of these contributions to the

understanding of awareness about racism, it seems that few, if any, studies have been conducted about whether people who may not have had college level diversity or multicultural course experience are able to recognize modern racism, especially more subtle forms of racism, such as racial microaggressions.

Given that few studies have been conducted with regard to the ability to recognize racial microaggressions, as well as the harmful implications of microaggressions, it seems pertinent to investigate the ability of individuals to recognize microaggressions and examine potentially related beliefs, attitudes, or abilities held by those individuals, such as their attitude towards diversity, awareness of White privilege, or ability to empathize. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the extent to which people recognize racism and racial microaggressions by investigating the following hypotheses:

- Participants shown an overt racist aggression will have higher racism recognition than those shown a microaggression;
- Participants shown a microaggression will have higher racism recognition than those who view neither a microaggression nor an overt racist aggression;
- Racism recognition (ability to recognize racism in a video scenario) of participants shown the overt racist aggression will be positively correlated with awareness of White privilege;
- Racism recognition of participants shown the overt racist aggression will be positively correlated with more tolerant attitudes toward diversity; and
- Racism recognition of participants shown the overt racist aggression will be positively correlated with their ability to empathize.

Method

Participants

Participants were students found in a convenience sample from two private college campuses in Minnesota. The total sample (n = 208) consisted of people ranging in age from 18 to 35 with a median age of 19 (Mdn = 19.00, M = 18.97, SD = 1.48). Participants were primarily white, heterosexual, and Catholic first year college students (for demographic characteristics of the sample, see table A).

Table A

Demographic characteristics as a number and percentage of the sample

Characteristic	*n*	Percentage	Characteristic	*n*	Percentage
Gender			Political Beliefs		
Men	75	36.1	Very Conservative	4	1.9
Women	131	62.9	Conservative	47	22.6
Transgendered	1	.5	Moderate	109	52.4
Pefer not to answer	1	.5	Liberal	41	10.7
			Very Liberal	7	3.4
Race/ethnicity					
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	4	1.9	College Education		
			1st year student	131	63
Black American not Hispanic	3	1.4	2nd year student	53	25.5
			3rd year student	17	8.2
Asian/Asian American	19	9.2	4th year student	6	2.4
Latino/a	10	4.8	Home Town Population		
White American not Hispanic	161	77.4	<500	5	2.4
			500-1000	4	1.9
More than one race or ethnicity	9	4.3	1000-4000	30	14.4
			4000-10,000	21	10.1
Prefer not to answer	2	2	10,000-30,000	46	26
			30,000-50,000	20	9.6
Religion			50,000-85,000	33	15.9
Catholic	113	54.3	85,000-100,000	7	3.4
Lutheran	34	16.3	>100,000	42	20.2
Baptist	3	1.4			
Other Christian denomination	16	7.7	Sexual Orientation		
			Heterosexual	193	92.8
Other religion not mentioned	9	4.3	Gay	1	.5
			Bisexual	2	1
No religious	31	14.9	Questioning	4	1.9

affiliation			Other	1	.5
			Prefer not to answer	4	1.9
Taken a Multicultural Course					
Yes	115	55.3			
No	92	44.2			

Materials

Racial aggression video scenarios. Three different video scenarios made up the three different conditions of the study. The video scenarios all portrayed the same scene: a White woman administering an IQ test to a Black man. All three scenarios used the same actors and had the same dialogue with the only variation being the type of racial aggression perpetrated toward the Black man. The control scene showed an interaction between the White woman and Black man that displayed no racial aggression in the dialogue. The microaggression condition showed an interaction between the woman and the man that displayed a racial microaggression towards the man, and the overt racism condition contained an interaction that displayed an overt racial aggression towards the man (see appendix A for complete video scripts).

Racism recognition. Racism recognition is defined as a participant's ability to discern whether or not he or she witnessed racism in the video scenarios. The racism recognition of participants was measured by using two survey instruments: the Improving Study Questionnaire and the Microaggression Questionnaire.

Improving Study Questionnaire. The first survey to measure racism recognition was the Improving Study Questionnaire. The Improving Study Questionnaire (ISQ) was designed for this study for the purpose of determining whether or not participants were independently able to recognize the racial aggressions portrayed in the video scenarios as offensive. The participants were asked to evaluate the video scenario they viewed and were told the woman in the video was being trained to administer exams in order to give the participants a plausible reason for

evaluating the video. The participants were told they were to evaluate the interpersonal interaction between the trainee and the exam taker. Participants were then asked to rate 14 statements on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating "Strongly Disagree" and 7 indicating "Strongly Agree" Questions include: "If I were the one taking the exam, I would feel that the examiner treated me well," "The examiner's overall performance during the video was good," "The examiner was insulting toward the exam taker," and "The examiner was considerate." On select questions pertaining to the examiner's treatment of the man in the video and whether she was insulting or sympathetic toward the man, participants were asked to provide an open-ended elaborative response on why they responded to that question in that particular way. Lower scores on the Improving Study Questionnaire indicated that a person was less able to independently recognize the racial microaggression and overt racism presented in the video scenario as offensive. For this study, the Improving Study Questionnaire had high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient at $\alpha = .96$ (see appendix B for complete list of questions).

Microaggression Questionnaire. The second survey to measure racism recognition was the Microaggression Questionnaire. The Microaggression Questionnaire (MQ; Lenzen, 2012) was designed to measure participants' responses to gender microaggressions and was adapted for the current study to determine if participants would label the aggression that they witnessed as racism. Participants were told that the man in the video was upset by how he was treated and then asked to indicate their agreement with eight statements on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 indicating "Strongly Disagree" to 7 indicating "Strongly Agree." Statements include: "The man is right in getting offended," "This incident really was not a big deal," and "The trainee was wrong in her comments," Lower scores on the Microaggression Questionnaire indicate that a person is less able to recognize the presence of the racial microaggression or overt racism in the

video clip after being told that interaction therein was upsetting to the man. The Microaggression Questionniare, in its original use, was shown to be internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .91 (Lenzen, 2012). For the current study, the Microaggression Questionnaire also showed internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha $\alpha = .90$. Furthermore, the Improving Study Questionnaire and the Microaggression Questionnaire were significantly correlated in both the microaggression condition $r(68) = .7$, $p < .01$, and the overt racism condition $r(68) = .74$, $p < .01$ (see appendix C for complete list of questions).

White privilege. White privilege is defined as the unearned benefits that come from being White. Participants' awareness of White privilege was measured using the White Privilege Awareness Scale. The White Privilege Awareness Scale (WPAS; Hays, Chang, & Decker, 2007) is a 13 item subscale from the Privilege and Oppression Scale which was designed to measure an individual's level of awareness of social issues, with lower scores indicating lower awareness. Participants were asked to rate each question on a 6-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (6). The survey asked participants to rate themselves on questions such as: "I believe that being White is an advantage in society," and "Individuals do not receive advantages just because they are White." The White Privilege Awareness Subscale has shown high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .91$, as well as good test-retest reliability and convergent validity (Hays et al., 2007). For the current study, the White Privilege Awareness scale had a reliability of $\alpha = .91$.

Attitudes toward diversity. Diversity refers to a plurality of races and equality. Participants' attitudes toward diversity were measured using the Quick Discrimination Index (QDI; Ponterotto, Burkard, Rieger, & Grieger, 1995); the QDI is a 30-item Likert type inventory that measures attitudes towards racial diversity (multiculturalism) and gender equity. Participants

were asked to rate questions on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "strongly agree." Higher scores on the Quick Discrimination Index indicated greater comfort and more positive attitudes toward racial and gender equality. Questions included statements such as, "Most of my close friends are from my own racial group," "Overall, I think racial minorities in America complain too much about racial discrimination," and "I think the president of the United States should make a concerted effort to appoint more women and racial minorities to the country's Supreme Court." The Quick Discrimination Index has shown good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of .88, as well as adequate face, construct, content, and criterion related validity (Ponterotto, et al., 1995). For the current study, the Quick Discrimination Index had a reliability of $\alpha = .87$.

Empathy. Empathy is defined as a person's ability to relate to another person. Participants' ability to empathize with others was measured using the Empathy Quotient- Short (EQ-Short; Wakabayashi et al., 2006); the EQ-Short is a 22-item scale used to measure empathizing responses. Participants rated whether they "strongly" or "slightly" agree or disagree to statements such as, "Other people tell me I am good at understanding how they are feeling and what they are thinking," or "Other people say that I am insensitive, though I don't always see why." For statements answered with strong empathizing responses participants received 2 points and for slight empathizing responses 1 point, with higher scores on the total measure indicating a higher degree of empathy. The Empathy Quotient – Short has shown reasonable reliability and good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha at .90 (Wakabayashi, et al., 2006). For the current study, the Empathy Quotient – Short had a reliability of $\alpha = .87$.

Social Desirability Scale. The Social Desirability Scale (SDS; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) is a 33-item true or false scale that measures one's need to answer questions in a socially

desirable way. The socially desirable response to eighteen of the items are keyed true and the remaining 15 are keyed false, this response set would be highly improbable and indicates that the individual is giving socially desirable answers. Statements included "No matter who I am talking to, I'm always a good listener," "There have been occasions where I took advantage of someone," and "My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant." The Social Desirability Scale has shown good internal consistency (.88), as well as good test-retest reliability (.89) (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). For the current study, the Social Desirability scale had a reliability of $\alpha = .75$. For the purpose of the current study, this survey was used as a method to control for participants who responded in a way which is socially desirable but not truly reflective of their thoughts or beliefs.

Demographic questionnaire. The nine item demographic questionnaire was designed for this study for the purpose of determining participants' age, gender, race, sexual orientation, political beliefs, religious belief, and size of hometown, whether or not a participant has taken a multicultural course, and the participant's year in college. The participant checked the most applicable answer for all of the questions. Additionally, there was a fill in the blank "other" option for the sexual orientation and religious belief demographic questions.

Procedure

Participants were recruited for this study over two semesters through a course requirement for Introduction to Psychology classes, Psychology Research in Action (PRIA).

Each participant followed a URL link to the experiment, whereupon each participant was asked to read an informed consent form and indicated their willingness to participate in the experiment, and verified that they were 18 years of age or older. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine public opinion about interpersonal interactions of those

who administer exams. They were informed that they would be asked to watch a brief video of a person being trained to administer exams and then would answer some brief questions about it afterward. Participants were also informed that they would be asked to complete several surveys as well.

After completing the informed consent section, each participant completed the demographic questionnaire and the Social Desirability Scale before being shown one of the three video scenarios. Participants were then asked to follow a URL link to view the trainee's performance video and instructed that they should watch the video carefully, then return to the survey page to answer evaluation questions honestly and to the best of their ability. The participants were not restricted from re-watching the video. As a method for ensuring that participants viewed the correct manipulation, participants were asked to report in as accurate detail as possible what they had observed in the video. Participants were then asked to complete the Improving Study Questionnaire. Participants in the microaggression condition and the overt racism condition were asked to complete the Microaggression Questionnaire. Participants in the control condition were not asked to complete the Microaggression Questionnaire because no microaggression was present in the control video scenario, and providing participants with a survey indicating that racism was present, when in fact there was no racism might be confusing to participants.

Finally, participants were asked to complete the remaining surveys, which were presented in counterbalanced across the conditions to avoid possible order effects. Upon completion of the surveys, each participant was then lead to a page that debriefed them and informed them that the true purpose of the video scenarios was to obtain opinions and reactions about the interactions contained in the scenarios, that the people portrayed in the videos were actors, and that in some

cases the script intentionally contained a discriminatory statement. After the debriefing, each participant was thanked for their participation and asked to keep the content of study confidential until the end of the semester to ensure that the true purpose of the study remain unknown for future participants and prevent carry over effects to other participants.

Results

Hypothesis Testing

The number of participants in each group was relatively equal among the conditions, with $n = 72$ in the control condition, $n = 68$ in the microaggression condition, and $n = 68$ in the overt racism condition.

To test the first two hypotheses of the study, several ANOVAs were conducted. The first hypothesis stated that participants in the overt racist condition would have higher racism recognition than those in the microaggression condition. As recognition of racism was defined as a score on the Improving Study Questionnaire (ISQ) and a score on the Microaggression Questionnaire (MQ) an ANOVA of each score was conducted to test this hypothesis. In terms of the ISQ, there was a significant difference in scores among the different conditions of the independent variable $F(2, 205) = 258.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .72$. The mean scores indicate that the average score of the participants who viewed the control video scenario was the lowest ($M = 27.65$, $SD = 8.36$), while the average scores of participants who viewed the microaggression video scenario was higher ($M = 75.6$, $SD = 12.86$) than the mean score of those who viewed the overt racism video scenario ($M = 64.26$, $SD = 17.09$), which is contradictory to the original hypothesis. In terms of the MQ scores, there was no significant difference in scores among the conditions $F(1, 134) = 2.80$, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. While MQ scores were not collected for participants in the control condition, the mean scores of the remaining two conditions indicate

that participants in the microaggression condition scored higher (M = 46.34, SD = 7.82) than those in the overt racism condition (M = 43.74, SD = 10.13), which is also contradictory to the original hypothesis. Therefore, in terms of both the ISQ scores and the MQ scores, the hypothesis was not supported.

In testing this hypothesis, an attempt was made using the Social Desirability Scale to control for participants providing socially desirable responses. Toward this end, the scores of participants who responded with socially desirable answers 75% of the time or more were excluded from analysis. However, the hypothesis testing after excluding these participants' answers revealed similar results, with the similar patterns in mean scores. For ISQ scores, the difference among conditions was significant $F(2,191) = 226.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .77$. However, analysis of the mean scores indicated that those in the microaggression condition had higher scores (M = 75.06, SD= 12.96) than those in the overt racism condition (M = 64.39, SD = 17.07). For MQ scores, there was still no significant difference among the conditions $F(1, 125) = 2.68$, $p = .10$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Furthermore, mean MQ scores showed the same trend previously observed, with participants in the microaggression condition scoring higher (M = 45.99, SD = 7.93) than those in the overt racism condition (M = 43.33, SD = 10.26). Therefore, even while controlling for socially desirable responders, the hypothesis was not supported.

The second hypothesis stated that participants in the microaggression condition would have higher racism recognition than those in the control condition. As no data was collected from participants in the control condition on the Microaggression Questionnaire, the analysis of this hypothesis was based solely on scores from the Improving Study Questionnaire, with higher scores on the ISQ indicating higher recognition of racism. A t-test was conducted to determine if the difference between those in the control group and those in the microaggression condition was

the significant difference indicated in the ANOVA. There was a significant difference found in ISQ scores between those in the two conditions $t(134) = 3.98$, $p < .001$. The results indicate that ISQ scores of participants in the microaggression condition were higher ($M = 75.6$, $SD = 12.86$) than the scores of those in the control condition ($M = 27.62$, $SD = 8.36$). Therefore, the second hypothesis was supported, indicating that the presence of the microaggression caused the participants to agree that the content of the microaggression video was offensive.

As recognition of racism was defined as a score on the Improving Study Questionnaire (ISQ) and a score on the Microaggression Questionnaire (MQ), to test the remaining hypotheses, bivariate correlations were run using both scales. The third hypothesis stated that participants' ability to recognize racism in the overt racism condition would be positively correlated with awareness of White privilege. In terms of ISQ scores, there was no significant correlation between ISQ scores and White privilege awareness $r(68)= -.09$, $p = .45$. Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between MQ scores and White privilege awareness $r(68) = -.152$, $p = .21$. Therefore, the third hypothesis was not supported.

The fourth hypothesis stated that participants in the overt racism condition's racism recognition would be positively correlated with more tolerant attitudes toward diversity. A bivariate correlation analysis revealed that there was no significant relationship between ISQ scores and attitudes toward diversity $r(68) = -.03$, $p = .81$. Furthermore, there was no significant relationship found between MQ scores and attitudes toward diversity $r(68) = .12$, $p = .32$. Therefore the fourth hypothesis was also not supported.

Finally, the fifth hypothesis stated that participants in the overt racism condition's racism recognition would be positively correlated with the ability to empathize. In terms of ISQ scores, no significant relationship was found between ISQ scores and ability to empathize $r(68) = .14$, p

= .23. Interestingly, a significant positive correlation of medium strength was found between MQ scores and ability to empathize $r(68) = .28$, $p = .01$. Therefore, as only one of the two measures for racism recognition was correlated with the ability to empathize, the hypothesis was only partially supported.

Table B
Summary of correlations of scales for participants in the overt racism condition

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. ISQ	–	.742**	.149	-.03	-.093
2. MQ	.742**	–	.284*	.123	-.152
3.EQ-Short	.149	.284*	–	-.094	.111
4.QDI	-.03	.123	-.094	–	-.482**
5.WPAS	-.093	-.152	.111	-.482**	–

*$p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table C
Summary of correlations of scales for participants in the microaggression condition

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. ISQ	–	.697**	.077	.09	-.249*
2. MQ	.679**	–	.266*	.165	-.286*
3. EQ-Short	.077	.266*	–	-.126	.081
4. QDI	.09	.165	-.126	–	-.442**
5. WPAS	-.249*	-.286*	.091	-.442**	–

*$p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Discussion

Participants in the overt racism condition were not better able to recognize racism than participants in the microaggression condition. In fact, participants in the microaggression condition scored significantly higher on the ISQ, and were approaching a significant difference in MQ scores, indicating they were actually better at identifying the racism contained in the microaggression video than those who viewed the overt racist video. Given Sue's (2010) analysis that the recipients of microaggressions are often left wondering whether or not racism actually happened, as well as Marti et al.'s (2000) finding that prototypical forms of prejudice are more readily recognized over non-prototypical types of prejudice, the results of the current study contradict the previous research.

There are several factors which could be influencing these results. For instance, over half of the participants reported having taken a multicultural course in the past, and the majority of participants were also first year students. This might indicate that students are receiving diversity training at younger ages than they have in the past, and that the current study results are representative of this change in diversity awareness. Another factor that could be influencing this result is that almost half of all the participants, 49.1% originated from hometowns with populations larger than 30,000 people (n=102). Larger hometowns will likely show a greater diversity in population demographics, and it is possible that this has resulted in greater exposure to issues related to diversity for those participants, thereby better enabling them to identify racism (Wu, Hou, & Schimmele, 2011).

Qualitative data was also collected with regard to the participants' thoughts about the video they had viewed. While the qualitative data was not scored and underwent no statistical analysis, it may reveal some insight into why those in the microaggression condition had higher scores on the ISQ. The purpose of the ISQ was to determine if participants were able to

recognize the racist event as offensive. In examining the qualitative data for the microaggression condition, many participants made the observation that they found the comment made by the woman in the video to be offensive or rude, while fewer went so far as to identify the portrayal in the video as racist.

The following are examples of observations made by participants in the microaggression condition: “She was nice while explaining the exam, but the insult afterwards was unnecessary.”; “She made the statement that some of these questions may be hard for me after hearing where I was from. It comes off as offensive.”; “The examiner rudely told the man that the exam might be a little difficult to him because he was from South Chicago.”; and, “She was kind, but was biased and treated him stereotypically due to where he was from.”

In contrast, in their qualitative responses, many participants in the overt racism condition freely labeled the interaction as racist. The following are examples of observations made by those participants in the overt racism condition: “I would strongly disagree because the teacher pretty much just called my race dumb in general which was a racist remark and made me feel uncomfortable;” “She said something that was racist against the African American culture;” “The statement ‘I know that your people have trouble with the hard ones,’ seemingly targeting the man's race as a handicap, is not something to be taken kindly;” and “She told the African American that ‘I know you people have trouble with the hard questions so do your best.’ This is a racial comment and would be absolutely unacceptable. I would feel highly offended if I was in the man's shoes.”

It seems plausible that participants might have had an easier time labeling the overt racist condition as a racist event, and that being able to label the event as racist affected how offensive they found the comment to be. In effect, the lack of ambiguity in the overt racist condition might

have influenced the participants to feel that the event was less offensive because it was easily identified and dismissed. Additionally, as the ISQ was designed to measure participants' ability to label an event as offensive, it seems natural that those in the microaggression condition, facing ambiguity of a microaggression (Sue, 2010), might have found the event to be very offensive even if they could not identify exactly why.

Another explanation for participants' responses in the overt racism condition might be explained by Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali & Dovidio's (2009) study of affective and behavioral responses of people who are not part of the targeted racial group to racist comments. When asked to evaluate their feelings about a scenario containing a blatant racist comment towards a black man, Kawakami et al, (2009) found that people predicted that they would be very offended. Yet, when people actually experienced or witnessed the blatant racist event in person they showed relatively little emotional distress (Kawakami et al., 2009). As a possible explanation for their results, Kawakami et al. (2009) reason that those asked to predict feelings may have relied on conscious egalitarian attitudes, while the emotions of those who experienced the event may have been shaped by non-conscious negative attitudes. In the current study, it seems a plausible explanation that participants in the overt racism condition responded similarly and did not rate the overt racist aggression as offensive because they experienced little emotional distress in watching the event.

Participants in the overt racism condition did have better racism recognition than those in the control condition in terms of rating offensiveness. Those in the overt racism condition did label the event they witnessed as offensive. While those in the control condition, those who witnessed no racist event, had a significantly lower scores on the ISQ, indicating that they did not recognize the video they viewed to be offensive. The difference in MQ scores between the

control condition and the microaggression condition supports Sue's (2010) assertion that microaggressions do carry negative, hostile, or derogatory messages, and participants did recognize that the microaggression was offensive.

White privilege awareness was not related to recognition of racism. While Case (2007) found that diversity courses improved both White privilege awareness and awareness of racism, the results from the current study indicate that the two are not related. It is possible that in the specific environment of a diversity training course, the two types of awareness might correlate because they are discussed within the same sphere of understanding. Whereas the results from the current study indicate that in the environment of a study, where participants were not primed to think in terms of race or White privilege, awareness of the two concepts are not correlated. It is also possible that the study did not have enough power to produce a significant correlation between the two factors.

There was no relationship between recognition of racism and attitudes toward diversity. Despite Kernahan and Davis (2007) finding that students' knowledge about diversity increased students use of the words "racism" and "racist" to describe racist events, participants' attitudes towards diversity were not related to their ability to recognize racism in the current study. Similar to the lack of correlation between White privilege awareness and recognition of racism, it's possible that attitudes towards diversity and recognition of racism might be more highly correlated in the context of a diversity course where students have been primed to think in terms of race, privilege and diversity. As participants in the current study were not given a racial context within which to approach the video scenarios, it is possible that attitudes towards diversity were simply not a factor in being able to recognize racism.

There was no relationship found between a person's ability to empathize and their ability to label a racist event as offensive, however, there was a relationship between a person's ability to empathize and their ability to label an event as racist. This result at least partially supports a relationship between empathy and recognizing racism and lends support to Ensari, et al.'s (2012) finding that empathy is an effective component in reducing prejudice in that it helps people to recognize when a situation is unfair. Interestingly, in the qualitative data, participants frequently phrased their observations in empathetic terms. Oftentimes, participants interpreted the scene as if they were the man experiencing the microaggression, and wrote such phrases as: "The examiner made me feel inadequate to take the exam but was very warm and helpful"; "The examiner made a racist remark so I would feel very disrespected"; or "I feel like warning about the difficulty of some of the questions would be implying the examiner doubted my intellectual abilities."

Limitations

The limitations of this study include a possible lack of power to assess differences in MQ scores, as well as any correlations between scores on the MQ, ISQ, QDI, WPAS, and EQ-Short. While the sample included more than 200 individuals, it is possible that this was insufficient to detect significant results where they may actually exist. Additionally, participants had little variation in their responses to the demographic questionnaire, with participants being predominantly White Americans not Hispanic, Catholic, and heterosexual. These factors could indicate that the external validity of the study is limited. Furthermore, the results could be skewed in favor of these dominant demographics and might not be applicable to other demographics within the population.

Due to the constraints of the available technology for administering the study, the assignment to levels of the independent variable was not formally randomized, instead relying on the researcher to switch the experimental condition available to participants every 10 to 20 participants. It is possible that the lack of true random assignment might have resulted in experimental conditions that were not functionally equal and possibly could be obscuring significant results.

There were also slight variations in dialogue and reaction in the video scenarios. These variations were not a part of the manipulation of the independent variable and may be potential confounding factors in the study's results. Furthermore, the microaggression portrayed in the microaggression scenario relied on participants ability to recognize that South Chicago has a predominantly Black and low-income population. In their qualitative responses, many participants recognized that the suggested geography was an important aspect of what transpired in the scenario, but lacked the knowledge to recognize the context of Blackness implied by the geographic location. This ambiguity ultimately may have confused participants as they tried to determine if the portrayed insult was racial or geographic.

Finally, data was collected during the course of one year. It is possible, though perhaps less likely, that societal awareness of microaggressions and White privilege, as well as attitudes towards diversity have experienced some change during that time period. Thus the results could be indicative of those changes and affect the significance of the study's findings. Furthermore, the length of time in which the study was administered could also have contributed to diffusion of treatment, as participants could have learned about the study from those who participated in the prior semester.

Future Directions

The previously established mental health implications of racial microaggressions combined with their continual manifestations in society present a potential public mental health risk, especially with regard to minority populations. Because of this, more research with regard to racial microaggressions needs to be conducted. Based on this study, it was found participants were able to recognize both microaggressions and overt racism as offensive, but were not better at identifying overt racism than identifying implicit racism. Additionally, factors of White privilege awareness and attitudes toward diversity were not found to be related to racism recognition, in apparent contradiction to previous research. Furthermore, some evidence was found that empathy may be a factor in recognition of racism. Future studies could examine more closely the role empathy plays in recognition of racism, with the goal of better understanding how to facilitate social change through use of empathy. Given that the ability to recognize a racist event as offensive and the ability to actually label it as "racism" or "racist" seem to be divergent, future studies could focus on understanding the divide between these two tendencies and why people can recognize something as offensive yet do not label it as racist. Studies focusing in this area could shed light on how to improve recognition of racism with the goal of reducing its effects through cultural awareness and education.

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Appendix A

Video Scenarios – Script

All Conditions-
(*Examiner stands as the man enters the room)*

Examiner: Hi, John?

Man: Yeah.

Examiner: Hi, I'm Mary. I'll be administering the exam today. Go ahead and have a seat.

(Man sits)

Examiner: So, the way this happens is, there are three sections to complete: one verbal, one math, and one critical thinking. So, you'll do one section at a time and then take a short five minute break in between sections. Do you have any questions?

Man: No, I don't think so.

Control Condition-
Examiner: All right (*hands over test*), go ahead and start whenever you're ready.

Microaggression Condition-
Examiner: So, um, (*looks skeptically at the man*) Where are you from?

Man: South Chicago.

Examiner: Oh, well, then some of the questions might be hard for you (*hands over test*), but, go ahead and start whenever you're ready
.
Overt Racism Condition-
Examiner: Some of the questions are kind of hard (*hands over test*), and I know your people have trouble with the hard ones, so just do your best, and go ahead and start whenever you're ready.

All Conditions-
(*man starts to complete test*)

Appendix B

Improving Study Questionnaire

Questions 1, 6, and 11 are accompanied by prompts for participants to elaborate on why they made their choice of answer: "please elaborate on why you selected that to be your answer."

*1. If I were the man taking the exam, I would feel that the examiner treated me well.

*2. The examiner's overall performance during the video segment was good.

*3. The examiner was respectful of the exam taker.

*4. The examiner was polite to the exam taker.

5. I observed bias from the examiner towards the exam taker.

6. The examiner was insulting towards the exam taker.

*7. The examiner was kind.

*8. The examiner was considerate.

9. The examiner was rude to the exam taker.

10. The examiner was offensive.

*11. The examiner was sympathetic to the exam taker.

12. The examiner was discouraging toward the exam taker.

*13. The examiner was friendly.

14. The examiner was discourteous to the exam taker.

**15. Do you have any suggestions for the examiner for future administration of this exam?

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* Reverse Scored Items

** Only qualitative answers collected

Appendix C

Microaggression Questionnaire

1. The man is right in getting offended.

*2. This incident was not a big deal.

3. I would be offended if this happened to me.

4. The trainee acted inappropriately.

*5. The man should not be angry about how he was treated.

*6. The man was overreacting to the situation.

7. The trainee was wrong in her comments.

8. This video contains racism.

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* Reverse Scored Items