

Racial Microaggressions: Their Effects on Mental and Physical Health

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NNLM R4 Connections Webinar

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Land Acknowledgment

Most Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their lands through deceptive processes and colonialism. It is important to express gratitude and appreciation for those whose territory we reside and work on.

You can acknowledge the Indigenous people of the territory that you are on by using the database: <https://native-land.ca/>. Support native orgs in your area by pledging resources of time, in-kind, or financial donations.

Agenda

- Definition
- Select timeline of research
- Physical effects associated with racial microaggressions
- Psychological/emotional effects associated with racial microaggressions
- Physical effects associated with racial microaggressions
- Response and mitigation strategies

Definition

“Racial microaggressions are **brief and commonplace** daily **verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities**, whether **intentional or unintentional**, that communicate **hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults** to the target person or group”

(Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).

Messages and Metacommunications

“No. Where are you really from?”

- You are not American.

“Your English is so good!”

- You are a foreigner.

“You are so articulate!”

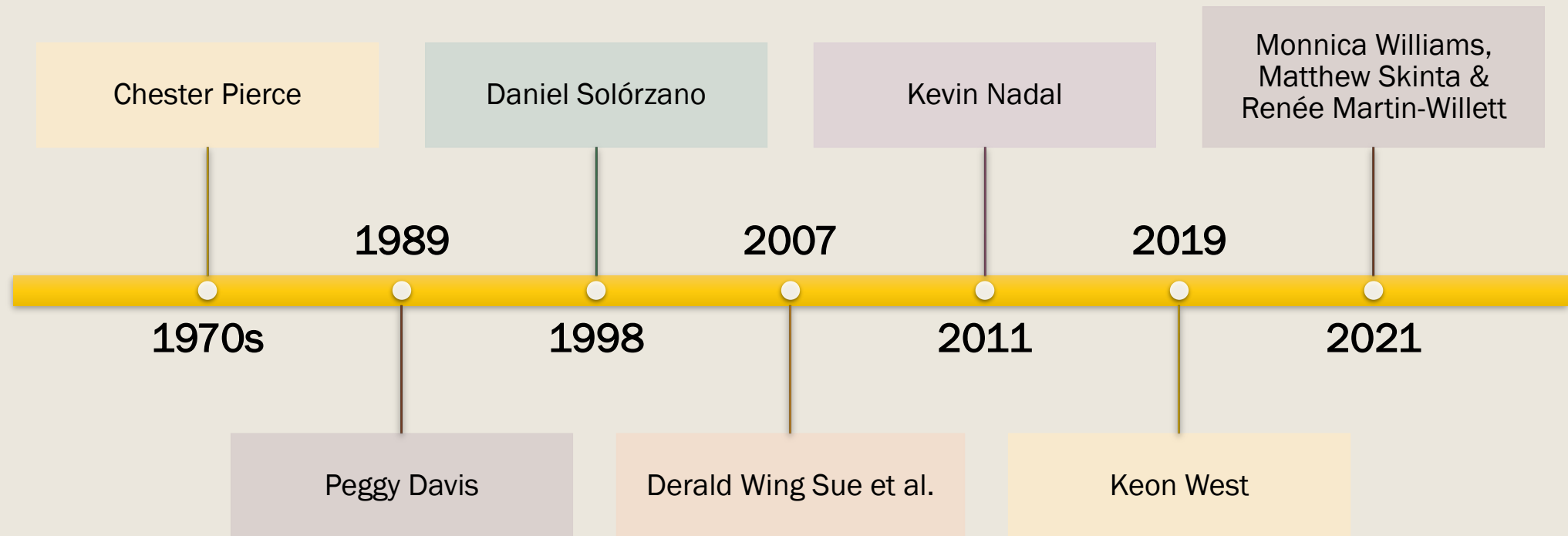
- It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.

“When I look at you, I don’t see color.”

- Denying a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences.

(Sue et al., 2007, p. 276)

A Select Timeline



Emotional and Psychological Effects

Low self-esteem

(Nadal, Wong, et al., 2014*; Thai et al., 2017*)

Stress

(Farber et al., 2020; Hall & Fields, 2015; Moody & Lewis, 2019 ; Nadal et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2010; Torres & Taknint, 2015)*

Anxiety

(Cheah et al., 2020*; Hope et al., 2018*; Liao, Weng, & West, 2016+; Ramirez & Paz Galupo, 2019*; Smith et al., 2007*; M. T. Williams, Kanter, & Ching, 2018*)

Depressive symptoms

(Gattis & Larson, 2017; Nadal, Griffin, et al., 2014; Robinson-Wood et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2010)*

Suicidal ideation

(Blume et al., 2012+; Hollingsworth et al., 2017*; O'Keefe et al., 2015+)

Psychological distress

(Cheah et al., 2020; R. J. Hernández & Villodas, 2020; J. Y. J. Kim et al., 2019; Lewis et al., 2017; Lui, 2020; Owen et al., 2014; West, 2019)*

Poorer overall mental health,
lower levels of psych well-being

(P. Y. Kim et al., 2017*; Nadal et al., 2012+)

*(As cited in Spanierman et al., 2021)

+(As cited in Torres-Harding et al., 2020)

Physical/Health Effects

- General somatic symptoms (Huynh, 2012*; Ong et al., 2013*; Torres-Harding et al., 2020+)
 - Headaches and stomachaches (Huynh, 2012)*
 - Backache and nausea (Ong et al. 2013)*
 - Sleep disturbances (Ong et al., 2017)*
- Increased cortisol (Zeiders et al., 2018)
- Insomnia and hypertension (Hall and Fields, 2015*)
- Increased risk of substance use/abuse
 - Substance use (Zapolski et al., 2021)
 - Alcohol use; binge drinking (Blume et al., 2012+; Su et al., 2022*)
 - Tobacco use (Lui & Quezada, 2019)*

*(As cited in Spanierman et al., 2021)

+(As cited in Torres-Harding et al., 2020)



Intervening in and Mitigating the Effects of Racial Microaggressions

Guiding Principles



Observer

What will I lose by not speaking up?

What do I want to accomplish?

Take action with compassion/care

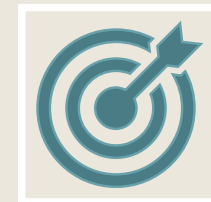


Perpetrator

Be open and receptive to feedback

Focus on impact, not intent

Seek restorative action



Target

First responsibility is to self

Take time to re-center

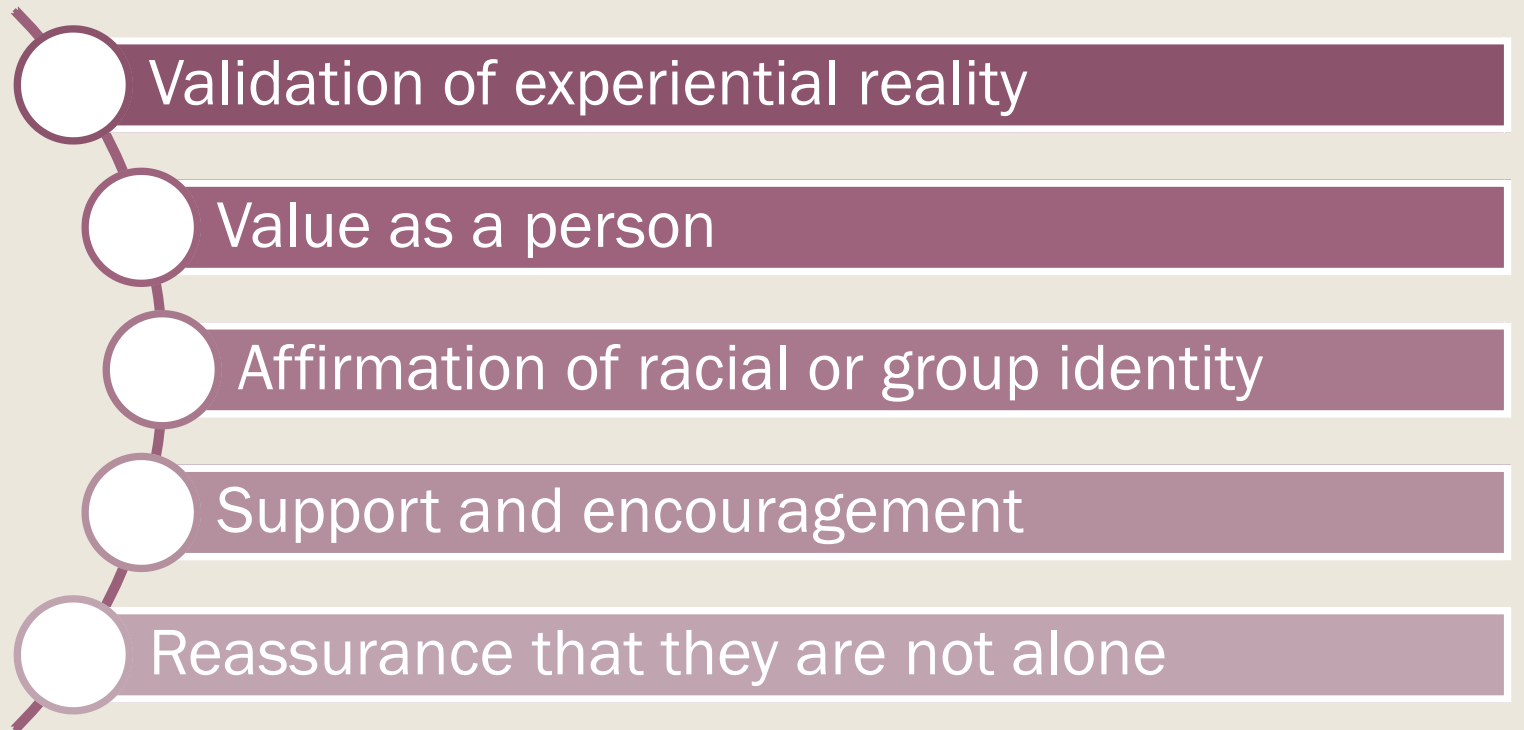
What do you want to happen?

Reclaim your voice

(Thurber & DiAngelo, 2018)

Microinterventions

Everyday words or deeds –
intentional or unintentional –
that communicate to targets of
microaggressions



(Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019)

Strategic Goals of Microinterventions

01

Make the
invisible
visible

02

Disarm the
micro-
aggression

03

Educate the
offender

04

Seek external
intervention &
support

(Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019, p. 135)

Make the invisible visible

- Undermine the meta-communication
- Make the meta-communication explicit
- Challenge the stereotype
- Broaden the ascribed trait to a universal human behavior
- Ask for clarification

(Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019, p. 135)

Disarm the microaggression

- Express disagreement
- State values and set limits
- Describe what is happening
- Use an exclamation
- Use non-verbal communication
- Interrupt and redirect

(Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019, p. 135)

Educate the offender

- Point out the commonality
- Appeal to the offender's values and principles
- Differentiate between intent and impact
- Promote empathy
- Point out how they benefit

(Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019, p. 135)

Seek external support/intervention

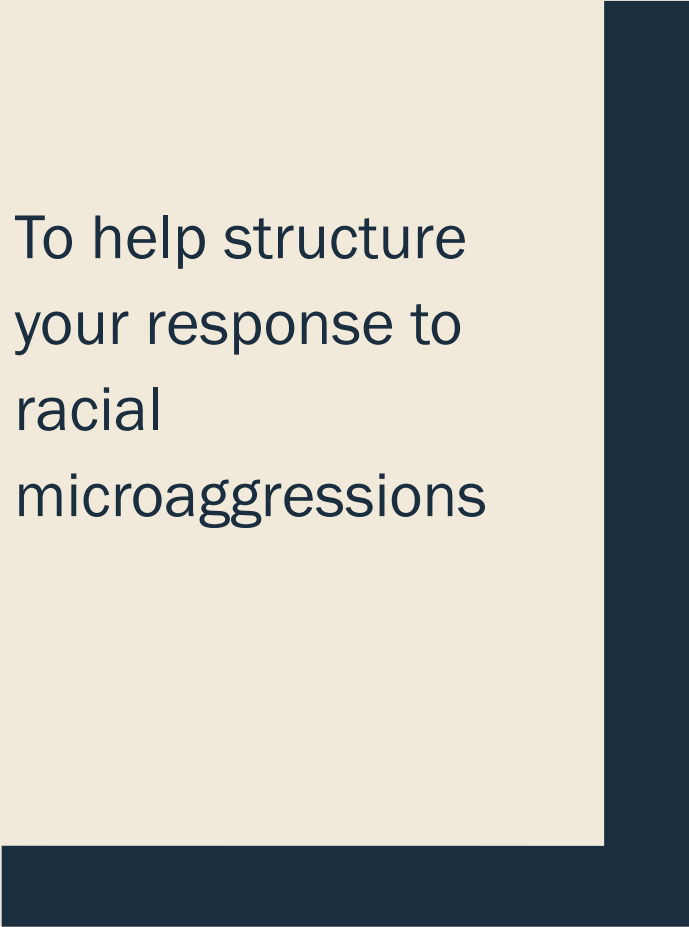
- Alert authorities
- Report the act
- Seek therapy/counseling
- Seek support through spirituality/religion/community
- Set up a buddy system
- Attend support groups

(Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019, p. 135)



Using Acronyms

To help structure
your response to
racial
microaggressions



Open the Front Door (OTFD)



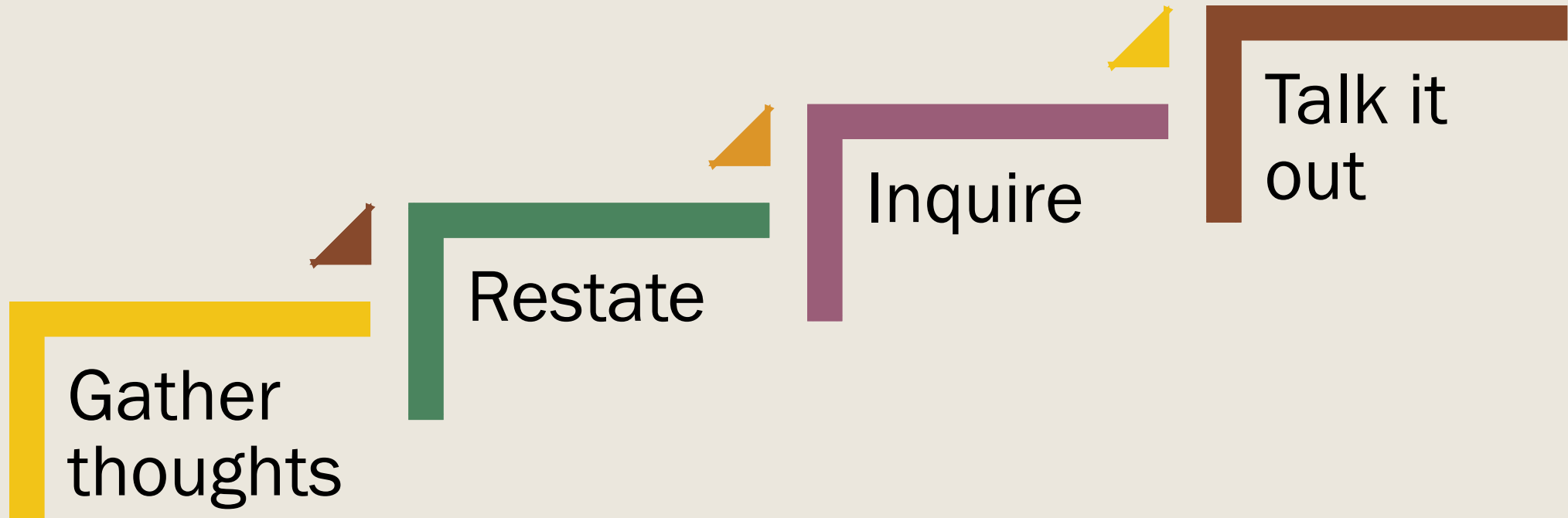
(Rockquomore, 2016)

OWTFD



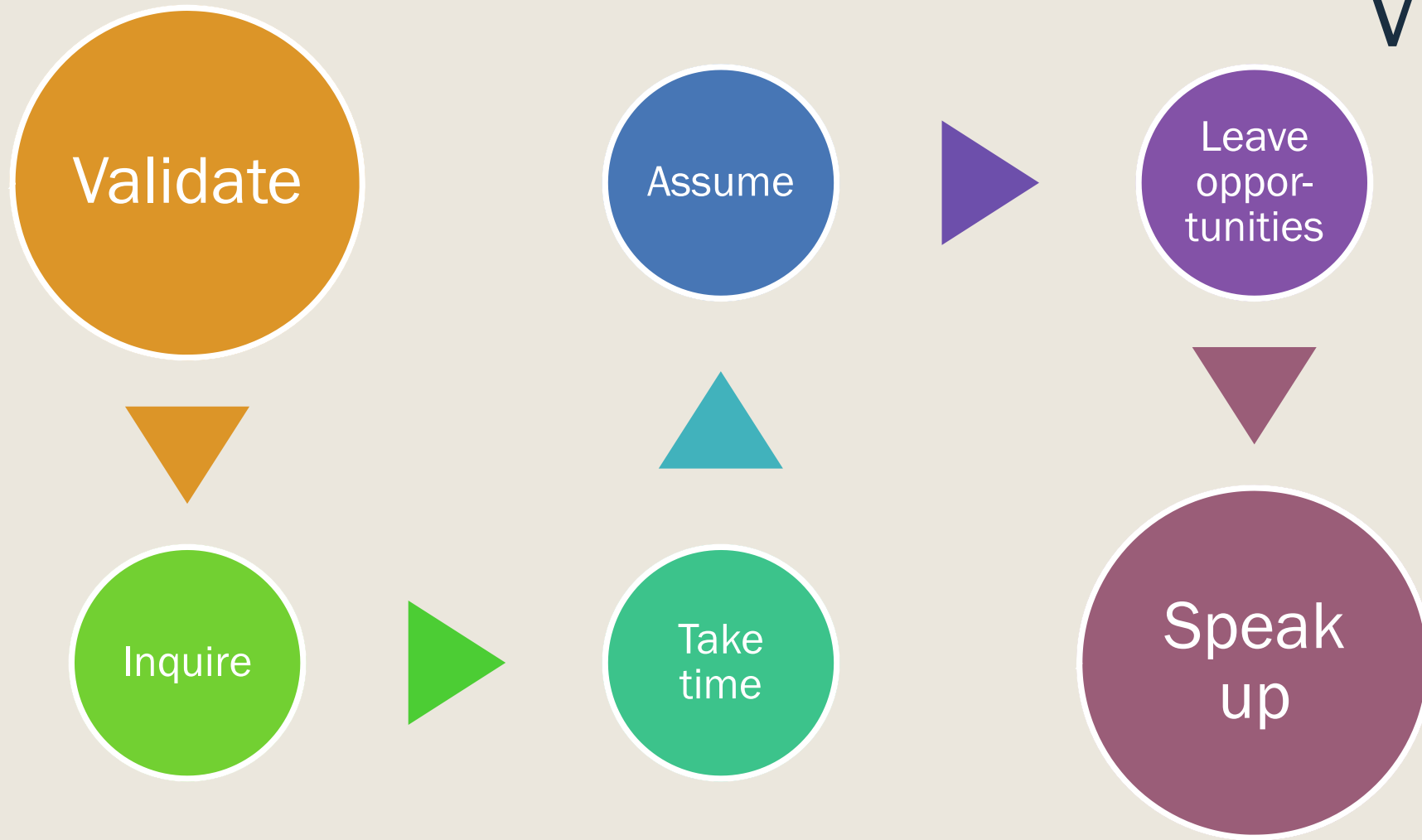
(Sotto-Santiago, Mac, Duncan, & Smith, 2020)

GRIT



(Warner, Njathi-Ori, & O'Brien, 2020)

VITALS



(Walker, Hodges, Perkins, Sim, & Harris, 2022)

Responding to Racial Microaggressions

- Responding in the moment can be difficult; processing requires time, space, & energy
- There is no one perfect response – context, relationships, and power differentials will affect how you respond
- You *will* mess up – but continue to improve and do better!



QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION



Thank you for your time!

Contact Information

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