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Racial slurs are prevalent in organizations; however, the social context in which racial slurs are exchanged remains poorly understood. To address this limitation, we integrate three intergroup theories (social dominance, gendered prejudice, and social identity) and complement the traditional emphasis on aggressors and targets with an emphasis on observers. In three studies, we test two primary expectations: (1) when racial slurs are exchanged, whites will act in a manner more consistent with social dominance than blacks; and (2) this difference will be greater for white and black men than for white and black women. In a survey ($n = 471$), we show that whites are less likely to be targets of racial slurs and are more likely to target blacks than blacks are to target them. We also show that the difference between white and black men is greater than the difference between white and black women. In an archival study that spans five years ($n = 2,480$), we found that white men are more likely to observe racial slurs than are black men, and that the difference between white and black men is greater than the difference between white and black women. In a behavioral study ($n = 133$), analyses showed that whites who observe racial slurs are more likely to remain silent than blacks who observe slurs. We also find that social dominance orientation (SDO) predicts observer silence and that racial identification enhances the effect of race on SDO for men, but not for women. Further, mediated moderation analyses show that SDO mediates the effect of the interaction between race, gender, and racial identification on observer silence.

Key words: racial slurs; interpersonal aggression; social dominance; gendered prejudice; social identity
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Introduction

The use of racial slurs, derogatory terms or comments used to categorize a racial group (Graumann 1998), has been shown to promote a hostile and abusive work environment and violates federal and state antidiscrimination laws (e.g., *Spriggs v. Diamond Auto Glass*,[1] *White v. BFI Waste Services*[2]). As one federal appeals court noted, "Perhaps no single act can more quickly 'alter the conditions of employment and create an abusive working environment' ... than the use of an [unambiguous] racial epithet ..." (*Rodgers v. Western-Southern Life Insurance*, p. 675).[3] Despite the unlawful and deleterious effects that racial slurs have in organizations, they remain prevalent. In a recent report by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2010) summarizing significant racial discrimination cases from 2003 to 2009, 25% of the case summaries included the use of racial slurs.

Although racial slurs remain rife in organizational settings, our understanding of the social context in which racial slurs have been propagated remains somewhat incomplete. Part of the reason for this is that racial slurs have rarely been placed at the forefront of research on interpersonal aggression by organizational scholars. Organizational researchers who study interpersonal aggression have focused on a variety of behaviors ranging from gossiping to physical abuse (e.g., Andersson and Pearson 1999, O'Leary-Kelly et al. 1996, Robinson and Bennett 1995, Tepper et al. 2007, Thau et al. 2007), yet to our knowledge, they have not highlighted the role racial slurs play as a critical form of interpersonal aggression in the workplace. Racial slurs have served as a central topic of study in bodies of literature outside of organizational theory, including communications, legal studies, and social psychology (e.g., Billig 2001, Boeckmann and Liew 2002, Graumann 1998, Greenberg and Pyszczynski 1985, Lawrence et al. 1993, Leets 2001). However, as would be expected, there has been limited focus on those concepts and phenomena that may be of central concern in an organizational context. Hence, there are at least two basic limitations in existing research that contribute to an incomplete view of the relational dynamics that help drive the usage of racial slurs: the first

limitation is related to our understanding of the behavior between social groups, and the second limitation is related to our understanding of the behavior between social actors (i.e., aggressors, targets, observers) involved in occasions when racial slurs are used.

First, one of the primary reasons why racial slurs are used—so that dominant racial groups can sustain social inequality—has not been fully explored in the study of racial slurs. Existing research has uncovered important insights, ranging from how slurs can be used to threaten another group's identity (Boeckmann and Liew 2002, Leets 2001) to how the linguistic complexity of slurs determines their impact on victims (Leader et al. 2009, Mullen and Rice 2003). However, less is known about how group members' desire for social inequality can drive the prevalence of racial slurs. Given that most organizational settings are predicated on meritocracy, it is important to understand how the use of racial slurs can contribute to the exclusion and subjugation of certain social groups by other social groups.

A second limitation in existing research is that scholars have focused primarily on the dyadic exchange among individuals *directly* involved in the occasions when racial slurs are used (aggressors and targets) and have not extensively examined the role of individuals who are *indirectly* involved: third-party observers (for exceptions, see Greenberg and Pyszczynski 1985, Kirkland et al. 1987). Many legal cases have indicated that the use of racial slurs occurred in the presence of individuals who observed this racially biased interpersonal verbal aggression yet took no action to address it (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2010). Examining the role of observers is important not only because of the potential for observers to decrease the occurrence of racially biased behavior by becoming actively involved (Czopp et al. 2006) but also because existing research on observer silence may not fully apply to the context of racial slurs.

Decades of research on bystander intervention (Latane and Darley 1970, Latane and Nida 1981), whistleblowing (Miceli and Near 1984, 1989, 1995), and employee silence (Bowen and Blackmon 2003, Milliken et al. 2003, Morrison and Milliken 2000, Pinder and Harlos 2001) have found that many observers refrain from taking action because speaking out can be too costly. For instance, observers may not take action because of personal risks, such as disruption to friendly relationships and fear of retaliation (Aboud and Fenwick 1999, Keenan 1990), or situational constraints, such as diffusion of responsibility and audience inhibition (Cacioppo et al. 1986, Latane and Darley 1970). Since most studies focus on individuals who have an inherent desire to intervene yet have difficulty speaking out for fear of situational constraints or personal risks, there has been little investigation into the possibility that some observers may remain silent in the face of blatant wrong-

doing not out of fear regarding what they stand to lose but of what they stand to *gain*. Specifically, racial slurs may help observers who are members of dominant social groups maintain social inequality, as such inequality increases the opportunity for members of these dominant groups to access valued social resources—such as power, status, and wealth.

In this article, we take two overarching steps to address the two limitations identified above and, more broadly, to bring greater nuance to our understanding of the characteristics of the social context that drive the perpetuation of racial slurs. First, we integrate three intergroup theories—social dominance theory (SDT; Sidanius and Pratto 1999), theory on gendered prejudice (McDonald et al. 2011), and social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel 1982, Tajfel and Turner 1986)—to ascertain which social group members are most vulnerable to being the target of racial slurs and which social group members are most likely to use slurs. We place social dominance theory in a central role to suggest that a key antecedent for those who use racial slurs is the desire for their dominant social group (in this case, whites) to retain a dominant social position relative to members of subordinate groups (in this case, blacks). We also outline the boundary conditions of social dominance by (1) using theory on gendered prejudice to suggest that distinctions between race in terms of racial slur usage may depend on gender (white men and black men differ more than white women and black women in terms of their orientation toward racial slurs) and (2) employing social identity to explain when the desire for inequality between men is likely to be strongest.

The second step we take is to place observers in a more central role as actors who can perpetuate or inhibit racial slur usage by virtue of their decision to either remain silent or speak out when they overhear coworkers using slurs. As noted, in the instances when researchers have moved beyond aggressors and victims to explore observers, they have largely focused on the idea that observers privately object to acts of interpersonal aggression based on personal standards of "what is right" (e.g., Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly 2005) yet do not take action because of situational constraints and other risk factors. We provide a more balanced perspective on the motivations of observers. In addition to the likelihood that some observers may want to prevent the usage of racial slurs yet remain silent because of perceived risks, we suggest that observers from socially dominant groups may remain silent because racial slurs serve as both symbolic and instrumental devices that reinforce the dominant position of their social groups. Our integration of social dominance, gendered prejudice, and social identity provides a basis for understanding which social group members are likely to tacitly endorse the usage of racial slurs by remaining silent and which social group members are most likely to speak out against

slurs. In this way, our integration of intergroup theories can explain the behavior of observers in a fashion that is similar to how it can explain the behavior of aggressors.

We build hypotheses consistent with this integrated theory of intergroup behavior and test them in three studies with three distinct methodologies. Across the three studies, we find that whites act in a more socially dominant manner than blacks in the context of racial slurs (a result in line with theory on social dominance). We also find that these racial differences are greater for men than for women (a result in line with theory on gendered prejudice). Finally, we find that racial identification augments the effect of gender on race (a result in line with theory on social identity). This research contributes to the extant literature on interpersonal aggression by providing a more complete picture of the multifaceted social context in which racial slurs are couched. Perhaps the most theoretically and practically important implication of this research is the identification of a reinforcing pattern that helps explain why racial slurs remain prevalent despite the significant social pressures that have emerged to curtail them: members of dominant social groups are most likely to use racial slurs against other social groups (Study 1 finding), members of dominant social groups are most likely to observe racial slurs (Study 2 finding), and observers from dominant social groups are the least likely to speak out against users of racial slurs (Study 3).

We begin our analysis by exploring the nature of racial slurs in organizational settings. We then explicate the intergroup framework and detail how it can be used to understand the behavior of targets, aggressors, and observers of racial slurs.

What Are Racial Slurs?

Interpersonal workplace aggression is generally defined as behaviors directed at others (e.g., coworkers, customers) with the intent of inflicting harm (Glomb and Liao 2003, Neuman and Baron 1998, Robinson and Bennett 1995). Racial slurs comprise a subset of interpersonal aggression that is targeted at racial groups (or individuals who are members of racial groups) to inflict personal or psychological harm, such as damaging their character or injuring their reputation. Accordingly, in our conceptual framework, we consider racial slurs to have three defining characteristics—they are *serious*, *overt*, and *discriminatory*. Given that, to our knowledge, there does not exist a conceptualization of racial slurs in organizational research, we conceptualize these three defining characteristics of racial slurs using theory and findings from critical race studies (legal research), social psychology, and discourse analysis.

Racial Slurs as a *Serious* Form of Interpersonal Aggression

Robinson and Bennett (1995) distinguish serious aggressive behaviors (e.g., verbal abuse, mistreatment) from minor aggressive behaviors (e.g., gossiping, competing nonbeneficially, blaming a coworker for a mistake). According to the authors' typology, the distinction between serious and minor aggression is the degree to which behavior will inflict harm on the targeted coworkers and the organization. Racial slurs have been studied as hate speech in critical race studies (Lawrence et al. 1993), as derogatory labels in social psychology (Greenberg and Pyszczynski 1985), and as disparaging jokes and pejorative insults in discourse analysis (Billig 2001). In each case, slurs have been shown to cause significant psychological harm. When aggressors have used racial slurs against members of other racial groups with the intention to terrorize and humiliate them, evidence suggests that aggressors often succeed. Targets of racial slurs experience lower life satisfaction, a higher incidence of posttraumatic stress disorder, and worse health conditions (Schneider et al. 2000). The negative effects of racial slurs have even been shown to extend to individuals associated with a racial target who are not members of the slurred group (Kirkland et al. 1987). Moreover, the implications of racial slurs on a target's well-being are not limited to psychological harm. Hate speech (Scott 1999) and derogatory jokes (Billig 2001) have both been linked to physical violence against racial minority groups, as slurs can precipitate the onset of violence when tensions between racial groups already exist. Accordingly, racial slurs are categorized as serious rather than trivial acts of aggression because they have the potential to impart serious psychological harm and to foster the conditions that lead to physical aggression.

Racial Slurs as an *Overt* Form of Interpersonal Aggression

In addition to their seriousness, racial slurs are overt, mostly unequivocal, and require very little context by perceivers to understand their intended meaning, such as when a Hispanic person is labeled a sp*c, or when blacks are jokingly referred to as enjoying watermelon and "shucking and jiving." There are important distinctions between these indisputable, unambiguous racist behaviors and less blatant racist behaviors—especially "hidden" forms of racism that have emerged as a more prominent type of racism over the past few decades. In particular, racial slurs are distinct from subtle racial comments, known as racial microaggressions (Constantine and Sue 2007, Davis 1989, Solorzano et al. 2000, Sue et al. 2007), which derive from contemporary forms of racism, such as aversive racism (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986), modern racism (McConahay 1986), and symbolic racism (Sears 1988). When providing examples of microaggressions, Sue et al. (2007) suggest that "You are a credit to your race" may imply that racial minorities are not as smart as whites, or "You are so articulate" may infer that it is unusual for someone of a particular race to be intelligent. Unlike these examples of racial microaggressions, whereby the intended meaning

of the racial content is often masked, ambiguous, and seemingly inconsequential, the intent of a racial slur is clear, deliberate, and overt.

Racial Slurs as a *Discriminatory* Form of Interpersonal Aggression

Racial slurs differ from many other forms of verbal aggression because they combine aggressive behavior with discrimination, defined as unequal treatment based on social categories (Graumann 1998, Graumann and Wintermantel 1989). The content and the linguistic terms that characterize racial slurs are in themselves discriminatory (Graumann 1998). There is a straightforward comprehension that the remark is meant to send a denigrating message to a target because of the target's racial heritage and to distinguish the targets from other racial groups. Racial slurs place targets into inferior outgroups and aggressors into superior in-groups (Allport 1954). The discriminatory nature of racial slurs can be distinguished from most other acts of serious interpersonal aggression that are not inherently discriminatory, including stealing from coworkers, endangering coworkers with reckless behaviors, and behaving in a physically aggressive manner (Robinson and Bennett 1995). Although these acts of aggression can be used to discriminate, they differ from racial slurs in that they are not *inherently* discriminatory. Racial slurs can also be distinguished from other discriminatory acts, such as biased hiring and promotion decisions, which do not necessarily involve aggression.

In short, racial slurs are characterized as serious, overt, and discriminatory. This conceptualization of racial slurs provides a basis for understanding which factors perpetuate their usage. To gain a deeper understanding of these factors, we explore theory on intergroup behavior.

An Integrated Theory of Intergroup Behavior

Racial slurs are used to reinforce divides between racial groups. To understand racial slurs thus requires an analysis of theory on intergroup dynamics. Social dominance (Sidanius and Pratto 1999) and gendered prejudice (McDonald et al. 2011) are appropriate theories for examining the usage of racial slurs because they both relate to social hierarchies, and, rather than implying that *any* social group may use slurs based merely on general principles of intergroup behavior (e.g., group conflict), they can help identify which *specific* social groups will be aggressors, targets, and observers of slurs more than others (e.g., white males will use slurs more than black males). We explore the tenets of both of these intergroup theories in greater detail and describe how they are related. We then incorporate social identity as a third component of this integrated theory of intergroup behavior because it can explain when the interplay between social dominance and gendered prejudice is likely to be strongest.

Theory on Social Dominance

Social inequality is the condition in which different categories of social groups have unequal access to resources (Kerbo 2008). According to social dominance theory, dominant social groups look to sustain inequality between themselves and subordinate groups because they benefit from greater access to finite resources, an inflated social status, and greater decision-making power in social and organizational institutions (Levin et al. 2002, Pratto and Shih 2000). Socially dominant groups maintain their preferred status through consensus on widely held ideologies. These collective ideologies, also known as hierarchical legitimizing myths, advance the notion that socially dominant groups are better and more worthy of social and organizational benefits than subordinate groups (Levin et al. 2002, Pratto and Shih 2000, Pratto et al. 1994, Sibley et al. 2007, Sidanius et al. 2000). Hierarchical legitimizing myths are tangibly represented by discriminatory behaviors, such as attributing negative social value to subordinate groups, denying subordinate groups access to valued resources, and individualized instances of personal prejudice and discrimination (Eibach and Keegan 2006, Pratto and Shih 2000). Furthermore, different hierarchical legitimizing myths give rise to discrimination against various stigmatized social groups, resulting in racism, sexism, and ageism (Eibach and Keegan 2006, Pratto and Shih 2000). Given that racial slurs are derogations targeted at racial minorities (subordinate groups in many organizations) by socially dominant groups to promote racial inequality, they may serve as tools to reinforce hierarchical legitimizing myths and to exclude racial minorities from attaining organizational rewards and benefits.

In Allport's (1954) seminal work *On the Nature of Prejudice*, he proposes that one of the central purposes of slurs was to promote this type of exclusion, and subsequent research has corroborated this prediction. Using archival data across 150 years and including 19 different ethnic groups, Mullen and Rice (2003) show that the use of slurs toward ethnic immigrant out-groups predicted the degree to which they were excluded in American society. Ethnic immigrant groups who were slurred to a greater extent were less likely to be admitted into the United States, less likely to receive naturalized citizenship, more likely to live in segregated neighborhoods, and more likely to be placed in hazardous and low-status jobs. Mullen and Rice's (2003) results support Allport's (1954) assertion that slurs can facilitate exclusion of target groups from the resources and benefits that are held by the socially dominant group. Leader et al. (2009) corroborate these findings in an experimental setting and show that slurs predicted the exclusion of fictitious ethnic out-groups. Using social dominance to capture differences between racial groups leads to one of our primary expectations in this research: members of dominant racial groups will use racial slurs more frequently than members of subordinate racial groups.

Theory on Gendered Prejudice

We draw on the theory of gendered prejudice (McDonald et al. 2011) to suggest that racial distinctions are likely to be more pronounced within the socially dominant gender group (i.e., men) than the socially subordinate gender group (i.e., women). The primary tenet of the theory of gendered prejudice is that because men are the greatest beneficiaries of hierarchically structured relationships and are more motivated by a desire to dominate outgroups to obtain greater economic wealth, social status, and power, they are more likely than women to engage in intragender aggression (i.e., aggression focused primarily against other members of the same gender).

In support of this theoretical perspective, McDonald et al. (2011) explain that, throughout human evolution, men have been socialized to monopolize symbols of dominance and material resources and to deprive other men of these symbols. In contrast, these intragender disparities are not found as frequently among women (McDonald et al. 2011, Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Evidence of this tendency toward control and domination can also be seen in contemporary organizational settings (Reskin and Roos 1990). Because men vie for the bulk of accumulated resources as they sit atop social hierarchies, intragender competition will be greater for men than for women. Integrating theory on gendered prejudice with social dominance theory leads to the second predominant expectation in this research: there will be greater differences in racially antagonistic behavior (e.g., the usage of slurs) between dominant and subordinate races for men than for women.

Theory on Social Identity

The central focus of social identity theory is the enhancement and preservation of the self-concept through group identification (Tajfel 1982, Tajfel and Turner 1986); that is, social identity represents the extent to which a person's individuality and distinctiveness is linked to their social group (Brewer 1991, 2003). As identification with an in-group increases, individuals increasingly act in ways that enhance their group's image and that minimize perceived out-group threat (Bizman and Yinon 2001, Branscombe and Wann 1994, Branscombe et al. 1993, Sidanius et al. 1994b). Although behaviors that reinforce social inequality across different racial groups and trigger mutual hostility among men and women can be understood from a social identity perspective, the maintenance of social hierarchies through discrimination against subordinate groups is not the central tenet of social identity theory. In contrast, the maintenance of social inequality is the central tenet of social dominance and gendered prejudice. We therefore argue that rather than being the primary explanatory mechanism, social identification plays a tertiary role by moderating the effects of social dominance and gendered prejudice.

Increasing identification leads individuals to behave differently depending on whether the group to which they belong is dominant or subordinate. Given that racial slurs are discriminatory in nature, increasing identification with a socially dominant group renders it more likely that one will endorse the usage of slurs against subordinate out-groups because racial slurs reinforce the superior social status of one's in-group. In contrast, increasing identification with a subordinate group leads individuals to resist slurs because subordinate groups suffer rather than benefit from discriminatory behavior (Gagnon and Bourhis 1996, Perreault and Bourhis 1999). This is consistent with existing research that has drawn on social identity theory to explain why individuals exhibit and oppose interpersonal aggression—including that which is discriminatory (Abrams and Hogg 1988; Boeckmann and Liew 2002; Boeckmann and Turpin-Petrosino 2002; Kern and Grandey 2009; Leets 2001, 2002, 2003; Sellers and Shelton 2003). Furthermore, social identification is more likely to enhance racial divides between men than women because theory on gendered prejudice suggests that differences in discriminatory behavior between races are likely to be more pronounced among men than women.

Overview of Current Research

In any situation in which racial slurs are used, the actors who comprise the social context can be divided into three categories: those who are targets of slurs, those who use slurs (i.e., aggressors), and those who are indirectly involved (i.e., observers). Our integration of theory on social dominance, gendered prejudice, and social identity leads to unique predictions with respect to each of these categories of actors, which we test across three studies with three distinct methodologies. In Study 1 (a survey of 471 employees), we examine the role of targets and aggressors. In Study 2 (an archival study of 2,480 employees), we examine which individuals are most likely to be observers of racial slurs. In Study 3 (a behavioral study with 133 participants, the majority of whom were employed at the time of the study), we examine which observers are most likely to speak out against slurs. Studies 1 and 2 examine the role of social dominance and gendered prejudice, and Study 3 tests the fully integrated model with all three intergroup theories. We emphasize observers in two of the three studies. By focusing on observers, greater insights can be gained about the social context in which racial slurs are propagated than when focusing only on targets and aggressors. Together, these three studies document how the actions of each of the actors associated with racial slurs (aggressors, targets, and observers) can be understood with the same principles of intergroup behavior.

Study 1: Targets and Aggressors

With the multitude of diverse populations that reside in the United States, there exist numerous racial groups

that may be categorized as either socially dominant or socially subordinate relative to other groups. However, few would argue that, given key historical practices (e.g., slavery, lynchings), judicial decisions (e.g., *Brown v. the Board of Education*[4]), legislation (e.g., affirmative action policies), and social movements (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement), the most prominent contrast of socially dominant and socially subordinate groups in the context of race has been between blacks and whites. Hence, in this research, we focus on the dynamics of racial slur usage among whites as socially dominant and blacks as socially subordinate in the United States.

The evidence that we have considered thus far on social dominance theory leads us to predict that socially dominant racial groups (e.g., whites) are less likely than socially subordinate groups (e.g., blacks) to be targets of racial slurs because hierarchical legitimizing myths and their manifestations—including racial slurs—serve to legitimize the oppression of subordinate groups rather than dominant groups (Sidanius et al. 2000). Furthermore, and in accordance with our integrated theory of intergroup behavior, differences in terms of who is targeted by racial slurs according to race are likely to be contingent on gender, with the greatest differences existing between men. Specifically, white men are less likely to be targets of racial slurs than black men, and this difference will be greater than the difference between white women and black women.

HYPOTHESIS 1A. *Blacks will be targets of racial slurs more frequently than whites.*

HYPOTHESIS 1B. *Race will interact with gender such that differences in the frequency of being a target of racial slurs will be greater between white and black men than between white and black women.*

By their nature, racial slurs are dyadic exchanges that involve not only targets but also aggressors. Given that whites are the most socially dominant racial group in most organizational settings (e.g., Thomas and Gabarro 1999), it follows that they are more likely to use racial slurs than blacks, a socially subordinate racial group— whites can use slurs to reinforce their dominant social position, whereas blacks in organizations usually do not occupy dominant social positions that need to be upheld. When coupling our previous arguments on targets of racial slurs with these current arguments on users of racial slurs, the prediction that is most consistent with social dominance theory is that whites will use racial slurs to target blacks more than blacks will use racial slurs to target whites because dominant social groups tend to use racial slurs against subordinate social groups to perpetuate their oppression. Furthermore, the prediction that is most consistent with our integration of theory on social dominance and gendered prejudice is that white men will target black men more frequently than black men will target white men and that this differ-

ence will be greater than the difference between how frequently white women target black women and how frequently black women target white women.

HYPOTHESIS 2A. *Whites will target blacks with racial slurs more frequently than blacks will target whites with racial slurs.*

HYPOTHESIS 2B. *Race will interact with gender such that differences in how much aggressors target individuals of a different race and the same gender will be greater between white and black men than between white and black women.*

Method

Participants and Procedures. We used a research firm to recruit black and white participants who resided in the United States, worked full time, and were over the age of 21. Of the 633 participants who met our criteria and started the study, a total of 471 full-time working adults (58% women; 57% white) completed the study, resulting in a completion rate of 74%. The participants worked in an array of industries, including healthcare (13%), education (11%), general business (10%), government (8%), and manufacturing (6%), among others. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 65 years old (M $= 44.03$, SD $= 11.23$).

Measures. To ensure that participants understood our central construct of interest, we provided a definition of a racial slur as a derogatory or disrespectful name for a racial group or a disparaging remark about an individual's racial group. To gauge the frequency that members of different social groups had been *targeted* with a racial slur in the previous year by someone of a different race, we asked the question, "At work, has a racial slur ever been targeted at you or spoken about you by someone who is of a different race than you?" Responses to these questions were coded as 1 (yes) and 0 (no). We then used the respondent's social group (white men, black men, white women, or black women) in tandem with the responses to this question to determine the likelihood that each social group was targeted. Data collected from this measure were used to test Hypotheses 1A and 1B.

Hypothesis 2A and 2B predicted the extent to which participants would target coworkers of a different race (Hypothesis 2A) and coworkers of a different race and same gender (Hypothesis 2B). Given the legal and political ramifications that may sometimes accompany using racial slurs, participants may be hesitant to accurately report this deviant behavior (even in an anonymous survey). Hence, to assess Hypotheses 2A and 2B, we relied on respondents to report how many times members of each racial and gender group targeted their racial group. Specifically, we asked each participant how many times members of their racial group were targeted with racial slurs by (1) white men, (2) white women, (3) black men,

and (4) black women in his or her entire career. To assess Hypothesis 2A and determine how many times that participants had been *targeted with a racial slur by someone who was of a different race* in their careers, we created a variable called *interrace targets*. We used the participants' responses to these questions in tandem with the participants' race and subsequently merged together all responses in which participants reported that a racial slur was targeted at them by a person of a different race, regardless of whether the aggressor was a man or woman ($M = 11.98$, SD $= 29.19$). To assess Hypothesis 2B and determine how frequently members of each social group had been *targeted with a racial slur by someone who was of a different race and the same gender*, we created a separate variable called *interrace/intragender targets* in which we used the participants' responses to these questions in tandem with the participants' race and gender and subsequently merged together all responses in which participants reported that a racial slur was targeted at them by a person of a different race and the same gender ($M = 5.78$, SD $= 16.35$). For white men, this was when they were targeted with a racial slur by a black man. For black men, this was when they were targeted with a racial slur by a white man. For white women, this was when they were targeted with a racial slur by a black woman. For black women, this was when they were targeted with a racial slur by a white woman.

Control Variables. Given that perceived discrimination has been shown to be higher among individuals with lower rather than higher socioeconomic status (Kessler et al. 1999), we controlled for education level and household income as indicators of socioeconomic status. First, education level was measured by responses to the question, "What is the highest level of education you have completed?" Responses were coded as follows: 1 (8th grade or below), 2 (9th grade–11th grade), 3 (high school graduate), 4 (some college), 5 (associate's degree), 6 (trade school), 7 (bachelor's degree), 8 (some postgraduate study), 9 (master's degree), or 10 (doctorate/Ph.D.). The ordinal responses were treated as a continuous variable, with higher values representing more education ($M = 5.56$, SD $= 2.11$). Second, household income was measured by responses to the question, "Which classification best describes your total pretax household income?" Responses were anchored with 1 (under \$10,000) and 12 (greater than \$200,000). The mean value for household income was 5.65 (SD $= 2.01$). Third, we also controlled for age given that racial slurs may become more or even less common as age increases.

Finally, given that racial slurs frequently occur in informal settings (e.g., in the workplace cafeteria), which are characterized by the natural grouping preferences of individuals (Tatum 1999), we controlled for social grouping patterns with four items. Participants were asked to report how much informal time (i.e., lunch, breaks) they typically spend at work with members of each of the four social groups of interest in this study (white men, black men, white women, and black women). Social grouping patterns are important to take into account because a social group member may be more or less likely to use a racial slur or be a target of a racial slur if he or she spends more time with one racial group versus other racial groups. For instance, an employee who spends nearly all of her time with her own racial group will have fewer opportunities to hear someone of another racial group use a racial slur against her racial group than a different employee who spends most of her time with a racial group that is different from her own. Table 1 includes mean ratings and standard deviations for these four measures. As shown in Table 1, members of each social group tend to spend the most time with members of their own social group: white men spend the most time with white men, white women spend the most time with white women, black men spend the most time with black men, and black women spend the most time with black women. All control variables were standardized.

Results

To test Hypothesis 1, we employed hierarchical binary logistic regression analysis (Kleinbaum 1994), which uses maximum likelihood estimation, an iterative process, to calculate the unstandardized coefficients. The predictor variables were entered cumulatively in successive regression models to determine the significance that each model has beyond the previous model. We tested the likelihood that members of each social group would be targeted by a racial slur. In support of Hypothesis 1A, whites were less likely than blacks to be targets of racial slurs ($B = -1.40$, SE $= 0.29$, Wald $= 22.95$, $p < 0.001$; see results in Model 1 in Table 2). In line with Hypothesis 1B, race interacted with gender to predict the likelihood that an individual would be the target of a racial slur ($B = -1.27$, SE $= 0.54$, Wald $= 5.49$, $p = 0.019$; see results in Model 2 in Table 2). To further understand the interaction, we calculated the predicted probability that a participant would be the target of a racial slur. As depicted in Figure 1, the difference in predicted probabilities between white men and black men ($p < 0.0001$) was greater than the difference between white women and black women ($p = 0.005$).[5] Thus, Hypothesis 1B was supported.

We used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to test Hypothesis 2A and 2B.[6] The main effect for race (white $= 1$) on the *interrace targets* variable was significant ($\beta = -0.16$, $p = 0.003$). Whites were less likely to report being targeted by blacks than blacks were to report that they were targeted by whites. This supports Hypothesis 2A, which predicted that whites were more likely to target blacks with racial slurs than

Table 1   Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations for the Extent to Which Informal Time Is Spent in Race and Gender Groups as a Function of Participants' Race and Gender

| | Informal social groups | | | | | | | |
| | Black men | | Black women | | White men | | White women | |
Participants	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Black men	**3.83**[a]	1.54	3.53[a]	1.49	3.55[a]	1.37	3.33[a]	1.50
Black women	3.19[b]	1.65	**4.23**[b]	1.44	2.96[b]	1.65	3.83[a]	1.59
White men	2.95[b]	1.48	2.65[c]	1.46	**4.35**[c]	1.35	3.70[a]	1.58
White women	2.45[c]	1.40	3.08[a]	1.61	3.53[a]	1.64	**4.49**[b]	1.38

Notes. Means with different column superscripts differ at $p < 0.05$. Mean ratings in bold represent the extent to which informal time is spent with same race/same gender social groups.

blacks were to target whites with racial slurs. In support of Hypothesis 2B, race interacted with gender on the *interrace/intragender targets* variable to predict the frequency that an individual would be targeted by an individual of the opposite race and same gender ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$). Consistent with Hypothesis 2B, we found that the slope for men significantly differed from 0 ($t = -5.12$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the slope for women did not significantly differ from 0 ($t = -0.65$, $p = 0.517$; see means in Figure 2).

Discussion

To date, there has been little understanding about how these complex intergroup processes drive who is targeted by racial slurs and who uses racial slurs. Our results shed light on these unanswered questions. Overall, the findings from Study 1 suggest that theories on social dominance and gendered prejudice help explain patterns in terms of who is targeted by slurs and who uses slurs. The insights derived from this study are important given that targets and aggressors are the parties who are directly involved in the dyadic exchange of racial slurs

Table 2   Hierarchical Binary Logistic Regression on Targets of Racial Slurs (Study 1, Hypotheses 1A and 1B)

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	−0.78***	0.20	−0.93***	0.21
Age	0.10	0.12	0.12	0.12
Education	−0.01	0.07	−0.01	0.07
Income	0.02	0.07	0.03	0.07
Informal social groups				
White men	0.07	0.10	0.09	0.10
Black men	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.10
White women	−0.23*	0.10	−0.26**	0.10
Black women	0.10	0.10	0.12	0.10
Race (white = 1)	−1.40***	0.29	−0.86**	0.35
Gender (male = 1)	−0.05	0.29	0.41	0.35
Race × Gender			−1.27*	0.54
Nagelkerke R^2	0.17		0.19	
χ^2 (df)	53.55*** (9)		59.15*** (10)	
$\Delta\chi^2$ (df)			5.60** (1)	

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Figure 1   Probability of Being Targeted by Racial Slurs (Study 1, Hypothesis 1B)
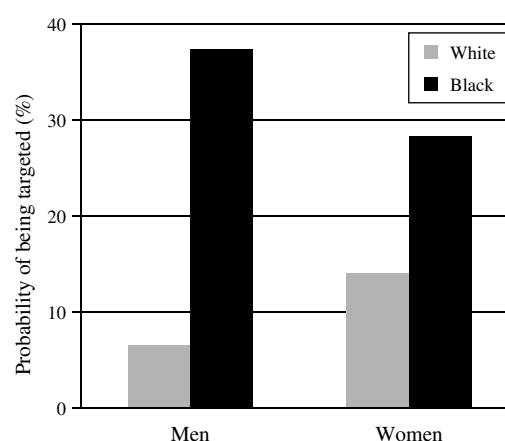
and comprise two of the three social actors involved in racial slurs (the other being observers).

We devote the remainder of our analysis to the role of observers. In Studies 2 and 3, we argue that (1) the likelihood of being exposed to racial slurs and (2) the decision to get involved or remain silent can both be attributed to the same intergroup processes that explain the behavior of targets and aggressors.

Figure 2   Reported Occurrences of Being Targeted by Someone of a Different Race but Same Gender (Study 1, Hypothesis 2B)
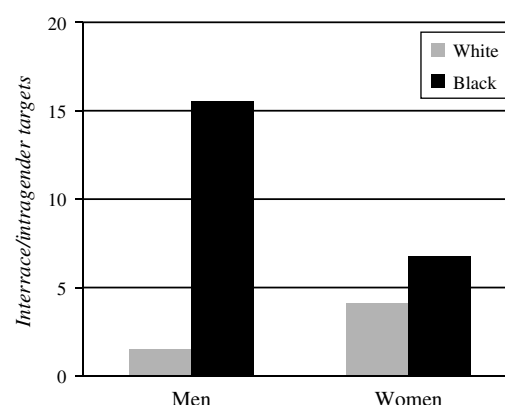
Study 2: Observers of Racial Slurs

Interpersonal aggression in the workplace has been shown to surface when aggressors are among like-minded individuals (Glomb and Liao 2003, Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly 1998) because people expect similar others to maintain their same beliefs and opinions (Cialdini 1993, Phillips 2003). Thus, racial slurs are likely to be spoken when the aggressor feels that observers share the same beliefs about the target as does the aggressor, because this will lead the aggressor to feel more comfortable uttering racial slurs. Indeed, according to research on deviant behavior, when members of social groups believe that aggressive acts are substantiated and justified, they are likely to exhibit aggressive behavior and use the perceived group consensus on ideologies to justify their actions (Cressey 1953, Robinson and Kraatz 1998). Given that we expect that aggressors are more likely to be from socially dominant groups (see arguments preceding Hypothesis 1), we therefore expect that observers of racial slurs are more likely to be from socially dominant groups. Furthermore, given that we expect that differences in aggression between blacks and whites are stronger for men than for women, we expect that differences in how frequently whites and blacks will be observers of racial slurs will be greater for men than for women.

HYPOTHESIS 3A. *Whites will observe racial slurs more frequently than blacks.*

HYPOTHESIS 3B. *Race will interact with gender such that differences in the frequency of being an observer of racial slurs will be greater between white and black men than between white and black women.*

Methods

Participants and Procedure. The data used for this archival study were collected by a market research firm. Over five years beginning in 2003, the market firm conducted an annual telephone survey that assessed the frequency with which racial slurs were overheard by survey participants at work during the prior year. The data were collected over a five-day period each year using a stratified random digit-dialing sample of telephone households. A stratified sampling method involves two stages. First, to ensure that there is adequate representation among various demographic categories, demographic data such as household income are used to break the sample into strata. Second, within each stratum, the population of households, which were available from a directory, was subsequently sampled by random digit dialing. The adult respondent with the most recent birthday was selected within each household. This maintained a random sample because there is no natural correlation between birthday and family membership. Respondent demographic information such as age, gender, and education were obtained. Household char-

acteristics, including annual income, were also reported by survey respondents. The respondents, who were all working employees, were asked if they witnessed their colleagues using racial slurs in the workplace during the previous year. The data set consists of 3,162 employees. Four hundred and five cases were eliminated because of missing data on portions of the questionnaire, and another 277 were eliminated because the participants did not identify their racial category as either white or black. This resulted in a final data set of 2,480 cases (gender: 55% men, 45% women; race: 90% white, 10% black; employment: 81% full time, 19% part time). The average age of participants in the final data set was 43.85 years (SD = 12.74).

Measure for Observation of Racial Slurs. The following question assessed whether participants had observed racial slurs being used in their work settings: "Did you hear one or more colleagues at work use a racial slur?" Their yes and no responses were coded as 1 and 0, respectively.

Control Variables. We again (as in Study 1) controlled for education, income, and age, all of which were standardized in the analysis. Education level was measured by responses to the question, "What is the last grade of school that you completed?" Responses were coded as follows: 1 (less than high school graduate), 2 (high school graduate), 3 (some college), 4 (college or technical school graduate), or 5 (graduate school or more). The ordinal responses were treated as a continuous variable, with higher values representing more education (M = 3.30, SD = 1.11). Household income was measured by 10 categories anchored by 1 (less than \$10,000) and 10 (\$100,000 and over). Higher values on the household income measure indicated more income (M = 7.33, SD = 2.34).

Results

Data analysis was conducted using hierarchical binary logistic regression. Model 1 in Table 3 provides the unstandardized coefficients for the control variables and the main effects. Hypothesis 3A predicted that whites would observe racial slurs more frequently than would blacks. Although the results are in the expected direction, the main effect for race was not significant (B = 0.26, SE = 0.17, Wald = 2.41, $p = 0.12$; see Model 1 in Table 3). Nonetheless, Hypothesis 3B was supported because the two-way interaction between race and gender was significant (B = 1.02, SE = 0.33, Wald = 9.73, $p = 0.001$), as depicted in Model 2 in Table 3. To further investigate the interaction, we calculated the predicted probability that an observer would be likely to hear racial slurs in his or her work environment given the observer's respective racial group and gender. The predicted probability for white males (38.41%) was more than 60% higher than the calculated probability for black males

Table 3 Hierarchical Binary Logistic Regression for Exposure
to Racial Slurs in the Workplace (Study 2,
Hypotheses 3A and 3B)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	−1.31	0.19	−0.80	0.24
Age	−0.02***	0.00	−0.02***	0.01
Education	−0.14**	0.05	−0.15***	0.05
Income	0.06*	0.02	0.06**	0.02
Year				
2004	−0.27	0.14	−0.26	0.14
2005	−0.24	0.14	−0.23	0.14
2006	−0.32*	0.14	−0.34*	0.14
2007	−0.53***	0.15	−0.52***	0.15
Race (white = 1)	0.26	0.17	−0.32	0.24
Gender (male = 1)	0.55***	0.10	−0.38	0.31
Race × Gender			1.02***	0.33
Nagelkerke R^2	0.06		0.07	
χ^2 (df)	105.15*** (9)		114.81*** (10)	
$\Delta\chi^2$ (df)			9.66*** (1)	

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

(23.60%; see all predicted probabilities in Figure 3). Furthermore, the likelihood of exposure to racial slurs significantly differed between white men and black men ($p = 0.001$) but did not significantly differ between white women and black women ($p = 0.227$). Thus, Hypothesis 3B was supported.

Discussion

Although we did not find support for our prediction that whites in general would be more likely to observe racial slurs than blacks, our results show that white men are more likely to observe racial slurs than are black men, whereas there is no significant difference in the frequency of racial slur observation between black women and white women. Thus, our results are consistent with

Figure 3 Probability of Overhearing Racial Slurs by Race and Gender (Study 2, Hypothesis 3B)
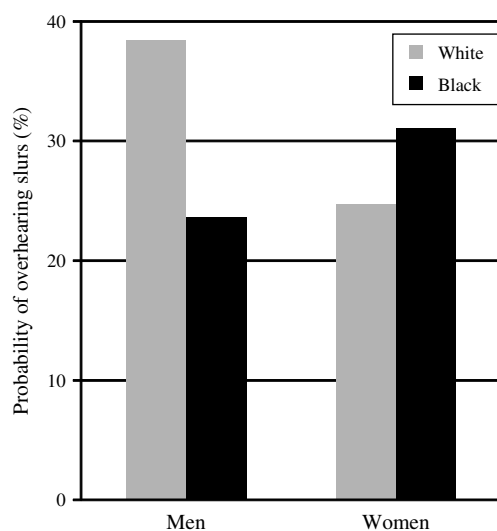
our integrated framework, which consists of both social dominance and gendered prejudice, and not supportive of social dominance theory in isolation. Although we cannot ascertain conclusively that white men are more likely to observe racial slurs than black men because they are more likely to be around other white men who use racial slurs than black men are likely to be around other black men who use racial slurs, the results are consistent with our integrated theory of intergroup behavior.

To be more confident that white men are more likely to overhear white men use racial slurs than black men are to overhear black men use slurs, there are two alternative explanations that need to be considered. First, white men may have observed racial slurs more than black men because white men may use racial slurs to target other white men to a greater extent than black men use slurs to target other black men; that is, it is possible that white men may have simultaneously been both the aggressor and the target to a greater extent than black men were both the aggressor and the target. This may have increased the likelihood that white men would overhear racial slurs in their work settings more so than black men. Given that this was an archival study that did not assess targets and users of the racial slurs but merely observers of racial slurs, we turn to our Study 1 data. Recall that participants were asked whether they have been targeted with a racial slur by each of the following racial groups: (1) white men, (2) white women, (3) black men, and (4) black women. Thus, we assessed the extent to which white men reported being targeted by white men, black men reported being targeted by black men, white women reported being targeted by white women, and black women reported being targeted by black women. Our post hoc analysis indicated that whites were not more likely than blacks to use racial slurs against their own race. In addition, our analysis showed that white men were not more likely than black men to target their own social group, just as white women were not more likely than black women to use racial slurs to target their own social group.

A second alternative explanation is that it is possible that blacks use racial slurs about whites in the presence of other white men more than whites use racial slurs about blacks in the presence of other black men. Hence, white men would hear a greater proportion of racial slurs targeted against them by blacks than the proportion of racial slurs that black men hear that are targeted against them by whites. Consequently, it is possible that white men were more likely to observe racial slurs not because white men used racial slurs more than black men but because white men had a greater likelihood of *overhearing* that they were targeted with slurs by black men than black men were to overhear that they were targeted with slurs by white men. To rule out this second alternative explanation, we again return to Study 1 data. In our data collection for Study 1, participants were asked how

likely the target of a racial slur was to be present when the participant's racial group used slurs. Our post hoc analysis revealed that blacks were not more likely than whites to use slurs against another racial group when the target was present. In addition, there was no interaction between race and gender on how likely social groups were to use racial slurs against another racial group when the target was present.

In short, our Study 2 findings, in conjunction with our post hoc analysis of Study 1 data, support our contention that racial slurs are likely to be used by socially dominant group members around other socially dominant group members; therefore, socially dominant group members are more likely than socially subordinate group members to be observers. This is consistent with the notion that aggressors will use the presence of like-minded individuals to give credence and legitimacy to actions that attempt to reinforce the dominant group's privileged social status.

Although the Study 2 findings extend the integrated theory of intergroup behavior beyond aggressors and targets to better understand how racial slurs are used in a broader social context that consists of observers, this study did not directly address the role of observers in sustaining the strong prevalence of racial slurs that is known to exist in the workplace; that is, an understanding of who is most likely to overhear racial slurs does not shed light on which observers are likely to speak out against them or remain silent in their presence. Identifying the characteristics of observers who are likely to speak out may provide a more complete explanation for why racial slurs remain prevalent. Thus, to complement the results from this archival study, in Study 3, a controlled behavioral study, we focus on the relationship among socially dominant groups, preferences for inequality, and the willingness to remain silent as opposed to speaking out when racial slurs occur in organizational settings.

Study 3: Understanding the Determinants of Observer Silence

When a racial slur is overheard in the workplace, an employee faces the decision about whether to remain silent or to speak out against it. Just as members of socially dominant groups are more likely to use racial slurs than members of socially subordinate groups because racial slurs help reinforce the social inequality that benefits their group's privileged status, observers from socially dominant groups are more likely to condone the usage of slurs because slurs— even when uttered by other group members—perpetuate the inequality that serves as the bedrock for their own privilege.

HYPOTHESIS 4A. *When exposed to racial slurs, white observers will remain silent more frequently than black observers.*

We suggest that the psychological underpinnings of observer silence are built on the same intergroup mechanisms—social dominance and gendered prejudice—that determine which observers are exposed to racial slurs. In a manner similar to how social dominance theory explains the tendency for socially dominant groups to *collectively* endorse behaviors that are beneficial to their group members, social dominance orientation (SDO) pertains to how socially dominant *individuals* endorse behaviors that are beneficial to them and their group members. SDO is an individual difference that pertains to one's preference for inequality between social groups and thus represents "the desire for generalized, hierarchical relationships between social groups, and ingroup dominance over out-groups" (Pratto et al. 1994, p. 999). SDO has been shown to strongly correlate with measures of racism (Pratto et al. 1994, Sidanius and Liu 1992). Moreover, research on SDO from the management literature has established positive relationships between SDO and (1) perceptions of employees of color as having low competence and low potential for career advancement (Aquino et al. 2005) and (2) willingness to discriminate against high-performing members from low-status groups (i.e., a female and a black male) "even when doing so would adversely affect their team's performance and ultimately harm their chance for a reward" (Umphress et al. 2008, p. 991). This existing research suggests that observers who have a strong social dominance orientation will lack the incentive to break the silence by speaking out because racial slurs help to maintain social inequality (Guimond et al. 2003, Pratto and Shih 2000, Pratto et al. 1994), whereas observers who possess a weak social dominance orientation will have a greater incentive to speak out.

HYPOTHESIS 4B. *SDO will be positively related to observer silence.*

Existing research has demonstrated that, in general, whites have stronger antiegalitarian attitudes and a greater SDO than racial minorities (Sidanius et al. 2000), and men have a stronger SDO than women (Sidanius et al. 2000, 1994a). Based on the integration of the theories of social dominance and gendered prejudice, we argue that the relationship between race and gender will be contingent upon one additional factor: social identity. Research on the ideological asymmetry hypothesis, a postulate that derives from social dominance theory, suggests that the influence of race and gender on SDO will be moderated by social identification processes (Levin et al. 1998, Sidanius et al. 1994c). The ideological asymmetry hypothesis posits that, as in-group identification increases, individuals from socially dominant groups will be more likely to justify behavior that reinforces social hierarchies and individuals from socially subordinate groups will be more likely to reject behavior that reinforces social hierarchies.

Among socially dominant group members, those who tend to identify more strongly with their in-group should have a stronger preference for social inequality because identification and affiliation with socially dominant groups provides access to the resources that help them to sustain their valued status as members of a dominant social group. Among socially subordinate group members, however, in-group identification should be more likely to lead to a repudiation of the social hierarchy that demotes their social group to the lower ranks. Extensive experimental research on social identity has shown that socially subordinate group members who possess group-serving attitudes (such as in-group identification) are more likely to reject social hierarchies when perceived as illegitimate, unstable, and impermeable (Ellemers et al. 1988, 1990; Hogg and Hains 1996; Jackson et al. 1996; Taylor et al. 1987; Turner 1978). Empirical research derived from the ideological asymmetry hypothesis also supports this rationale (Levin et al. 1998, Sidanius et al. 1994c). For example, Levin et al. (1998) showed that in the United States and in Israel, the more that high-status ethnic groups identified with their ethnicity, the more likely they were to endorse hierarchy-enhancing ideologies. Similarly, the more that low-status ethnic groups in these two countries identified with their ethnicity, the less likely they were to endorse such ideologies. When research on social dominance and gendered prejudice is considered in tandem with research related to social identity (i.e., ideological asymmetry hypothesis), we make the following prediction.

HYPOTHESIS 4C. *Gender, race, and racial identification will interact such that racial identification will enhance the difference between whites and blacks of SDO for men, but not for women.*

Given that the theoretical rationale that we have presented thus far suggests that (1) race predicts observer silence, (2) SDO predicts observer silence, and (3) gender and racial identification interact to moderate the relationship between race and SDO, we predict the following mediated moderation relationship.

HYPOTHESIS 4D. *SDO will mediate the effect of the interaction between race, gender, and racial identification on observer silence.*

Method

Participants. Senior- and junior-level undergraduates who attended an urban commuter university enrolled in a business management course (across three sections) were invited to participate in the study in exchange for extra credit. Of the 410 students who agreed to participate in the study by completing the pre-task questionnaire, 349 students finished the study by completing the online task and post-task questionnaire. Of those who finished the post-task questionnaire, 133 met simi-

lar racial demographics as participants in Studies 1 and 2 (70% white; 30% black). At the time of the study, 68% of the participants were employed. Of the participants who reported not being currently employed, 86% had previously worked for a company or corporation. The participants comprised a comparable number of men ($n = 62$; 47%) and women ($n = 71$; 53%) and had an average age of 24 years (SD $= 5.85$), ranging from 18 years to 47 years. Although specific demographics were not available for the participants who chose not to participate in the study, the demographics of our sample are comparable to the demographics in the business school from which the sample was drawn.

Procedure. The study consisted of three phases: a pretask questionnaire, an online task, and a post-task questionnaire. Approximately one to two weeks prior to completing the online task, participants received an email message with details about the study and a Web link to the pre-task questionnaire, which measured social dominance orientation. A Web link to the online task was then sent to the participants, and they had approximately three days to participate in the study. The online task was called "Task Force," and participants were told that the goal of the study was to assemble a special task force to review the costs and expenses of the fictitious company where they were employed, Dosatech Inc. The participants were then informed that a senior executive asked them to observe a meeting that would occur via an online chat session between two coworkers.

Participants were informed that they would have several opportunities while observing the discussion to provide feedback to the coworkers regarding the coworkers' decision-making process. Participants were not required to give this feedback. However, they were told that any comments that they did make would become a part of the meeting and the transcripts would be forwarded to the senior executive. Hence, some participants chose to direct their comments to the coworkers, and other participants chose to direct their comments to the senior executive who would ultimately review the transcript of the meeting. Given that participants could complete the study at their own convenience during the three-day window, they were aware that the task did not occur in "real time." However, they were under the impression that the online chat session was a business meeting and that their comments would be evaluated by others.

The participants then read the online discussion in which the coworkers considered a series of potential candidates for inclusion on the task force. Each time that the coworkers completed their discussion of a potential candidate, participants were asked if they wanted to make a comment. If they responded yes, then they were provided a comment box. During the coworkers' online discussion about four potential task force candidates, racial slurs were made. These four responses provided in the comment box served as the content for the dependent variable.

Racial Slurs. Based on our Study 1 results related to which racial groups are most likely to be targeted by racial slurs, the most realistic situation in an organization would involve racial slurs targeted at blacks. The racial slurs included in this study were pretested with participants ($n = 20$, 14 women, average age $= 23.35$, SD $= 1.60$) from the same population as the sample in the Task Force study. Participants in the pretest were asked to consider their current, previous, or future work environments when evaluating the different racial slur phrases. The phrases pertained to varying degrees of demeaning or harmful statements about blacks. We used Robinson and Bennett's (1995) typology of deviant workplace behavior, which considers verbal personal aggression as both serious and interpersonal, along with our own three-part definition of racial slurs as serious, overt, and discriminatory, to guide the development of each statement. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the phrases represented racial slurs (not at all, neutral, or very much so). The four racial slurs included in the study received mean scores that were significantly higher than the neutral scores ($p < 0.035$).

Observer Silence. The comments provided during the four opportunities in which the participants could provide feedback to the task force committee members when racial slurs were made were coded for involvement. According to the Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly (2005, p. 290) typology of observer intervention, involvement necessitates public and social communication and is "the willingness to take action on the 'social stage' of the organization." In addition, involvement can vary from low to high, whereby high involvement requires observers to directly intervene and place themselves into the discriminatory occurrence. Therefore, we equate "speaking up" in the domain of observing racial slurs to be high involvement, and comments coded as speaking up indicated that the participants either took direct action on the targeted victims' behalf (participant response example: "I am sorry, but I am going to report you to the human resources department for discrimination, and I do not care if you threaten me with my job. I would not want to work with someone like you anyway!") or would take direct action on the targeted victims' behalf if provided the opportunity (participant response example: "I would fire them for these comments, not just from the task force, but from the corporation") in the context of the scenario. Given that Hypothesis 4A predicted the extent to which participants would remain silent (as opposed to speaking up), the dichotomous variable was coded 1 if the participants chose to remain silent (*silence*) and 0 if the participants chose to take action.

Coding. We trained three coders to identify speaking up. The unit of analysis for coding was the entire comment provided at the conclusion of each selection decision.

sion. A comment could consist of one sentence or multiple sentences. We calculated reliability using Cohen's kappa, a statistical measure of interrater reliability that controls for chance agreements when calculating agreement rates between two independent coders (Howell 1992). Values above 0.75 are regarded as very high agreement (Fleiss 1981). Coders 1 and 2 (kappa $= 0.91$), coders 1 and 3 (kappa $= 0.87$), and coders 2 and 3 (kappa $= 0.81$) attained very high levels of agreement on this statistic.

Racial Identification. Racial identification was measured with Phinney's (1992) multigroup ethnic identity measure (MEIM; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$). The items were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). Sample items from the MEIM measure include "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own racial/ethnic group" and "I have a lot of pride in my racial/ethnic group." The overall mean score for MEIM was 5.09 (SD $= 1.12$).

Social Dominance Orientation. SDO was measured with the Pratto et al. (1994) measure of social dominance orientation (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$). The items were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). Sample items from the SDO measure include "Some groups of people are simply more deserving than others" and "This country would be better off if we cared less about how equal we all are." The overall mean score for SDO in our sample was below the neutral score of 4.0 (SDO mean $= 3.35$, SD $= 0.89$). However, our findings are consistent with previous SDO research. For example, across 13 different sample populations with approximately 2,000 participants, Pratto et al. (1994) show that on a seven-point Likert-type scale, the mean SDO score for each sample population was relatively low, ranging from a mean of 2.31 (SD $= 0.17$) to a mean of 3.13 (SD $= 0.66$). Our findings are consistent with that pattern.

Analysis
To account for the four repeated measures of a binary (dichotomous) variable (i.e., multiple Bernoulli trials), analyses to test Hypotheses 4A and 4B were performed using generalized hierarchical linear modeling (GHLM; Raudenbush et al. 2004). GHLM is included in the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) software, and similar to HLM, GHLM relaxes the independence assumption and allows for correlated error structures by recognizing the nested data structure. To account for the binary (dichotomous) dependent variables (level 1) nested within each subject (level 2), GHLM includes a necessary transformation and an appropriate error distribution called a logit link function (Guo and Zhao 2000). The unrestricted (sometimes called unstructured) covariance structure was used in these analyses. Given

the repeated measures structure of our data and given that there was not a specified time interval between responses in our data set, this specification was optimal in regard to conversion and fit compared with other structure specifications.

In addition, we controlled for two covariates that varied with each of the repeated measures: whether the comment was directed at the senior executive (0 if no, 1 if yes) and which of the four racial slurs to which the participant was responding. Given that, in accordance with pretests, the level 2 predictor variables (e.g., race and SDO) were not expected to vary in accordance with the specific racial slur or whether the responses were directed at the senior executive, they were not modeled to vary across these level 1 control variables.

We tested Hypothesis 4C with OLS linear regression, and the standardized coefficients are presented in the Results section. To test Hypothesis 4D, which predicted that SDO mediated the relationship between race, gender, and racial identification, we tested the overall significance of the indirect effect (i.e., the path through the mediator) of the three-way interaction by using bootstrapping to construct bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (Hayes 2009, Preacher and Hayes 2004, Stine 1989). If zero falls outside the confidence interval, the indirect effect is deemed significant, and mediation can be said to be present. Our model included gender and racial identification as two moderators of the path from race to SDO (i.e., gender moderated racial identification, and racial identification moderated the path from race to SDO). Hence, we tested mediated moderation, which assessed the indirect effect of race, gender, and racial identification on observer silence through SDO.

Results

Hypothesis 4A predicted that, when exposed to racial slurs, white observers would remain silent more frequently than black observers would. Hypothesis 4A was supported. Whites were more likely to remain silent than blacks ($\beta_{01} = 0.69$, SE $= 0.34$, $t(131) = 2.05$, $p = 0.042$; see the unstandardized coefficients in Table 4, Model 1). The odds ratio for race was 2.01, which suggests that whites were two times more likely to remain silent than were blacks.

Hypothesis 4B predicted that SDO would be positively related to observer silence. Hypothesis 4B was supported. As participants' SDO increased, they were more likely to remain silent ($\beta_{02} = 0.41$, SE $= 0.17$, $t(130) = 2.41$, $p = 0.017$; see unstandardized coefficients in Table 4, Model 2). Thus, Hypothesis 4B was supported. The odds ratio for SDO was 1.50, which suggests that a one unit increase in SDO on the Likert-type scale increases the odds of remaining silent by 1.50 times.

Hypothesis 4C predicted a three-way interaction between race, gender, and racial identification such

**Table 4** GHLM for Silence (Study 3, Hypotheses 4A and 4B)

Fixed effect	Model 1 B	Model 1 SE	Model 2 B	Model 2 SE
Intercept (β_{00})	2.60***	0.36	2.82***	0.37
Race (β_{01})	0.69*	0.34	0.49	0.30
SDO (β_{02})			0.41**	0.17
For slope π_{1i}				
SENEXEC (β_{10})	−1.14**	0.37	−1.23**	0.36
For slope π_{2i}				
Order (β_{20})	−0.56***	0.10	−0.57***	0.10
Random effect	Var	SD	Var	SD
Variance (r_{0i})	1.28**	1.14	1.24**	1.11

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

that racial identification would augment the difference between white and black men on SDO but not between white and black women. SDO scores were submitted to linear regression with race, gender, racial identification, and their corresponding two-way and three-way interactions. The overall model was significant ($F(7,125) = 5.66$, $p = 0.000$). The analysis revealed a main effect for gender ($\beta = 0.43$, $p = 0.035$), whereby men (M = 3.60, SD = 0.87) had higher SDO than women (mean = 3.07, SD = 0.85), and a main effect for race ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.05$), whereby white participants (M = 3.50, SD = 0.85) had higher SDO scores than did black participants (M = 3.00, SD = 0.93). These main effects were qualified by the two-way interaction between gender and racial identification ($\beta = -0.58$, $p = 0.04$). However, this two-way interaction was further qualified by a three-way interaction between race, gender, and racial identification ($\beta = 0.61$, $p = 0.023$). The three-way interaction is depicted in Figure 4. To localize the effects of this three-way interaction, we conducted slope difference tests. As predicted, the slope between black and white men for racial identification differed significantly from the slope between black and white men for low racial identification ($p = 0.008$); however, the slope between black and white women for high racial identification did not differ from the slope between black and white women for low racial identification ($p = 0.654$). Thus, Hypothesis 4C was supported.

Hypothesis 4D predicted that SDO would mediate the effect of the interaction between race, gender, and racial identification on observer silence. We tested for mediated moderation. The results showed that the confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect for the highest-order interaction excluded zero (95% CI, 0.06–0.83), which suggests that the indirect effect of race, gender, and racial identification on observer silence was mediated through SDO. When considering the influence of the two moderators at varying levels, our results showed that the effect of race on observer silence was mediated by SDO for men with high racial identification

Figure 4   Regression Mean Predicted Values of SDO as a Function of Race, Gender, and Racial Identification (Study 3, Hypothesis 4C)
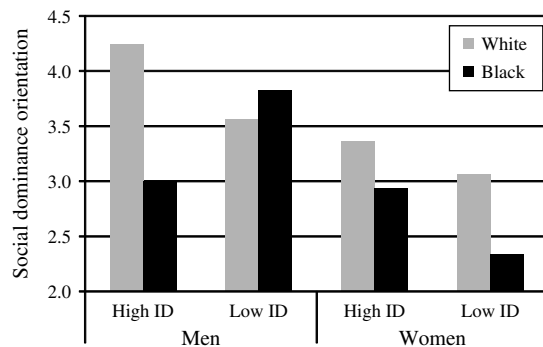
Note. ID, racial identification.

(95% CI, 0.16–1.06); however, SDO did not mediate the relationship between race and observer silence for men with low racial identification (95% CI, −0.46–0.05). The effect of race on observer silence was mediated by SDO for women with low racial identification (95% CI, 0.09–0.80) and women with high racial identification (95% CI, 0.04–0.52). In addition, the changes in effect size suggest that racial identification increases influenced men to a greater degree than women. In line with our predictions, increases in racial identification substantially increased the indirect effect between race and silence through SDO for men (indirect effect for low racial identification, −0.12; indirect effect for high racial identification, 0.55), whereas a small negative effect occurred for women (indirect effect for low racial identification, 0.34; indirect effect for high racial identification, 0.18).

Discussion
This study accomplished several goals. Consistent with predictions derived from SDT, whites were more likely to remain silent than blacks, and SDO was positively related to observer silence. Consistent with our integration of SDT and theory on gendered prejudice with SIT, we showed that racial identification enhanced the difference between white and blacks on SDO for men but not for women. In further support of our integrated framework, we showed that racial identification augmented the interaction between race and gender on silence through the mediating variable of social dominance orientation. The inclusion of racial identification adds a final contour to the integrated theory of intergroup behavior that informs our analysis. In this study, attitudes that facilitated the conditions that make racial slurs prevalent were driven by social dominance and were contingent upon gender, and this contingent relationship was dependent on racial identification.

General Discussion
Based on the tenets of our proposed intergroup framework, we predicted that socially dominant group members would be less likely to be targets of racial slurs than socially subordinate group members (Study 1), be more likely to use racial slurs than socially subordinate group members (Study 1), tend to use racial slurs around members of the same dominant social groups (Study 2), and be less likely to speak up against users of racial slurs than members from socially subordinate groups (Study 3). Our results support these predictions and, thus, advance organizational research in several important ways.

First, by integrating three distinct theoretical perspectives—social dominance theory, theory on gendered prejudice, and social identity theory—we were able to provide a more complete picture of the multifaceted group context in which racial slurs occur. Our integrated theoretical framework coupled with our empirical findings help explain the intergroup dynamics that allow the perpetuation of racial slurs. Our findings suggest that a core tenet of social dominance—preference for inequality—is likely a primary driver of the usage of racial slurs. In addition, by pairing the tenets of social dominance with those of the theory of gendered prejudice, we further demonstrated that tensions between socially dominant and socially subordinate racial groups are likely to be greater among men than among women. Our findings also suggest that social identity plays a role in sustaining racial slurs but that this role is complementary to social dominance and gendered prejudice, as identification explains when the differences between socially dominant and socially subordinate groups are greatest.

Second, by focusing on all of the organizational actors—the aggressor, target, and observer—who may potentially be present when racial slurs are used, our findings provide a more complete picture of the social environment in which racial slurs in organizations are embedded. Much of the research on interpersonal aggression has focused on the dyadic exchange that occurs between the aggressor and the target (e.g., Andersson and Pearson 1999, Aquino and Douglas 2003, Neuman and Baron 1998, Robinson and Bennett 1995, Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly 1998, Tepper 2000), whereas the broader social environment in which the dyadic exchange occurs has been given only minimal attention (for an exception, see Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly 2005). Our research addresses this limitation by considering that workplace discrimination does not merely occur in isolation but is frequently embedded in a social environment that includes observers of such occurrences. By attaining a better understanding of the factors that may motivate or hinder a third-party observer to remain silent when racial slurs are observed in the workplace, we can better understand the persistence of workplace discrimination.

In our endeavor to include the role of observers, we offered an alternative perspective on observer intervention. We provide a counterview to existing research

that has largely focused on the prevention of undesirable acts (e.g., Bowes-Sperry and Powell 1999, Levine and Crowther 2008, Levine et al. 2002) by also considering observers whose silence may represent support for the observed aggression by safeguarding an environment that allows racial slurs to persist. Assumptions from other literatures (e.g., bystander intervention) may not necessarily hold when resources for one's social group are at stake. In short, focusing on the benefits that can result from silently endorsing acts of interpersonal aggression provides insight into why such acts remain prevalent despite the significant legal, ethical, political, institutional, and societal pressures that have emerged to suppress them.

Third, our approach to understanding how the usage of racial slurs helps to sustain social inequality depicts how both sociological and psychological forces jointly contribute to the maintenance of social hierarchies. Existing research tends to focus primarily on psychological differences among observers (Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly 2005, Bowes-Sperry and Powell 1999, Latane and Darley 1970). In our research, we focus on the social and structural distinctions that give rise to these psychological differences among observers—namely, whether observers belong to certain socially dominant groups (e.g., white men in the United States) or certain subordinate social groups (e.g., black men in the United States). We highlighted how structural factors, such as competition over material resources (Jackman 1994, Levine and Campbell 1972), tend to parallel individual beliefs, particularly a preference for inequality (Pratto et al. 1994). We made this connection by linking group-level concepts (i.e., social dominance theory, theory of gendered prejudice, and social identity theory) to an individual psychological construct, social dominance orientation.

Managerial Implications

It is commonly argued that blatant, unequivocal racial slurs directed at subordinate social groups are relics of the past and do not frequently occur in organizational settings (Brief et al. 2000, Gaertner and Dovidio 1986, Sue et al. 2007). It is further often assumed that aggressors represent "rogue actors" who possess attitudes that are widely deviant from other workers. Thus, typical bystanders who witness such actors using slurs would prefer the restoration of a more civilized atmosphere by eliminating the use of slurs. Yet our findings cast doubt on these assumptions. Blatant displays of bias have not vanished from the workplace but instead are quite prevalent, and the observers who are most likely to be exposed to racial slurs are the least likely to speak out against those who use them, in part because they have greater belief in inequality.

Work environments in which racial slurs remain prevalent can lead to crippling consequences, such as class-action lawsuits and informal accusations made by

disgruntled employees and customers. Accusations of discrimination can be devastating to a company's public image, and it often takes years of diversity initiatives and proactive outreach programs to rebound from negative publicity and legal settlements. A single well-publicized incident of a racial slur may thwart the ability to attain a sense of trust from employees and establish the psychological safety necessary to cultivate a constructive work climate. Moreover, organizations may have difficulty retaining members from diverse backgrounds (Hom et al. 2008). A single instance of slur usage may also perhaps be more damaging for individual careers than many other transgressions. For instance, within the past decade, comedian Michael Richards, talk show host Don Imus, and actor Mel Gibson have had their previously successful careers suffer after incidents in which they used slurs.

Because of the prevalence of racial slurs and the severe consequences that can result from them, greater managerial intervention may often be necessary. Rather than using post hoc initiatives to manage the boundaries of racial groups, preemptive interventions may be needed. Rather than focusing primarily on managing the boundary between different racial groups, our findings suggest that managers should be aware that the establishment of a climate that prevents discrimination and prejudice may need to begin within socially dominant groups. Given that racial slurs frequently occur in informal settings where organizational members establish social ties (i.e., social networks and friendships), managers should encourage positive relationships that are demographically diverse. In particular, diversity and inclusion training should encompass modules that consider the intergroup dynamics of socially dominant and socially subordinate groups rather than merely focus on differences between group members in terms of identity, beliefs, customs, and other factors that do not directly relate to social hierarchies. It is the nature of social hierarchies that breeds the greatest antagonism, and thus this should be the primary focus of attention when attempting to improve intergroup relations.

Whereas people tend to cluster toward their own racial group in mixed racial settings because racial groups can provide a sense of identity, acceptance, and social support (Tatum 1999), the best way for the cycle of slur perpetuation to be broken is if the borders of socially dominant groups are permeable. Furthermore, perhaps with an increase in racial discourse across racial groups, socially dominant groups can fully understand the implications and consequences of allowing the use of racial slurs to persist without challenge in organizational settings. That is, they may be better able to understand that, although in the short run racial slurs may be beneficial to socially dominant groups, in the long run racial slurs may be to the detriment of both socially dominant groups and socially subordinate groups.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although our results are consistent with our predictions, we must note considerations that could potentially limit the generalizability of our findings. As with any methodological decisions, there are trade-offs, and we chose to complement the real-world context used in Studies 1 and 2 with a behavioral experiment in Study 3. The survey data from Study 1 and the archival data from Study 2 did not allow us to control for potential sources of extraneous variance that may have covaried with the independent predictors and dependent variables and thereby partially account for our results (Williams and Podsakoff 1989). Thus, we conducted Study 3, a behavioral study that allowed us to control for extraneous variance by holding stimuli constant across participants. However, there were no true relationships between observers and coworkers in Study 3; thus, it is possible that if our participants were involved in a candidate selection process with their actual coworkers, their reactions may have been more varied because personal relationships can influence social interactions. Future research should seek to examine observers' reactions to racial discrimination in actual work settings, if possible. However, given the potential legal ramifications related to observers' responses, the undertaking of such future endeavors should be orchestrated carefully.

In addition, we utilized student populations in Study 3, which can limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. However, it is important to note that over 95% of the Study 3 participants were either employed at the time of the study or had previous work experience. Hence, our participants were likely more familiar with the conceptualization of racial discrimination in work settings than other student populations. Also, given that the findings from Studies 1 and 2, which included working professionals, mirrored the Study 3 findings, and given that our Study 2 findings suggest that racial slurs were more likely to be observed by younger employees in the workplace (like the Study 3 participants) as opposed to older employees, this limitation is likely somewhat tempered.

We employed three studies with three distinct methodologies—a survey study, an archival study, and a behavioral study. Doing so provided a means of triangulating our results (Jick 1979). Thus, we emphasize that our studies are not necessarily meant to be evaluated in isolation—instead, they should be evaluated as complements that, when taken together, provide support for our overarching supposition that racial slurs are more likely to be used and supported by those who belong to socially dominant groups.

Conclusion

Our findings provide a unique perspective on the psychological and sociostructure factors that influence the prevalence of racial slurs in organizational settings. We suggest that the same theoretical lens involving intergroup theories can be used to understand the forces that drive certain members to be targeted by racial slurs, other members to use racial slurs, and still other members to remain silent or speak out when they observe racial slurs in organizational settings. It is our hope that the present research will spark future research that examines the role of intergroup theory in driving the behavior that sustains discrimination.

Endnotes

[1] *Spriggs v. Diamond Auto Glass*, 242 F.3d 179, 182, 185–186 (4th Cir. 2001).

[2] *White v. BFI Waste Services LLC*, 375 F.3d 288, 297–298 (4th Cir. 2004).

[3] *Rodgers v. Western-Southern Life Insurance*, supra, 12 F.3d 675 (7th Cir. 1993).

[4] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, S. Ct. 686, 98 L. Ed. 873 (1954).

[5] Given that logistic regression is used to predict the odds of being a case given certain predictor variables, it does not allow for the direct comparison of significant differences between predicted probabilities. Hence, in both Studies 1 and 2, we used analysis of covariance to assess the extent to which black men differed from white men and the extent to which black women differed from white women when utilizing logistic regression.

[6] Control variables were not significant for either the *interrace target* variable or the *interrace/intragender target* variable.

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