To Confront or Not to Confront:
Non-Targets’ Evaluations of and Responses to Racist Comments

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Abstract

The current studies explore situational and individual factors that affect non-target perceivers’ reactions and behavior following a racist comment, with a focus on verbal confronting behavior. Two studies were conducted in which participants reported about recent situations in which they witnessed a racist comment that was not directed specifically at their own racial group. Results indicated that only a third of participants directly confronted the commenter. Strength of verbal confrontation was predicted by affective reaction and judgments of the offensiveness of the prejudicial comment. Analyses also revealed that strength of confrontation for females was predicted by the experience of negative emotions but that males confronted more with stronger ratings of the offensiveness of the racist remarks. Implications for theory and policy are discussed.
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It happens to us more often than we might like to admit – a friend tells a racist joke or a family member expresses distaste towards members of a certain race. In these situations, how do you react? Do you confront the individual directly? Perhaps your reaction depends on how offensive you perceived the comment to be, how upset you were, or your assessment of the possible consequences. Although social psychological research has investigated how individuals react to being the target of a racist remark, research examining how non-target individuals react to prejudicial comments has been surprisingly scarce, despite the benefits of confronting prejudice which include reducing future discrimination (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). The current studies explore how racist comments affect non-target perceivers’ personal reactions and behavior. In particular, this research examines how non-target perceivers express distaste or support for the prejudicial statement, and explores several possible situational and individual factors that may contribute to confronting behavior.

Psychological research on prejudice has demonstrated that over the past few decades, self-reported levels of racism have declined (e.g., Devine & Elliott, 1995). In fact, most individuals today report feeling that it is important to be egalitarian and to not hold prejudicial beliefs about others based on their group membership (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Despite these findings, however, it is not uncommon for individuals to experience racist behaviors and hear comments made about their own racial group. Research by Swim and colleagues, for example, found that African American men and women reported an average of one racist incident per week (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Similarly, a study conducted by D’Augelli and Hershberger (1993) found that 48% of African American college students
reported hearing negative prejudicial comments about their racial group “often” or “frequently.” Although previous studies have not asked majority group members to estimate how often they overhear derogatory remarks about race, it is reasonable to estimate that these averages would be higher than those reported by minority groups; that is, although majority group members may refrain from making prejudicial comments in the presence of minority group members for fear of being perceived as racist, they may be less reluctant to do so without those group members present.

Social psychologists have begun to recognize the importance of investigating situations involving prejudicial comments for targets, non-target observers, and perpetrators of prejudice. Most of these studies have focused on the consequences of these situations for targets and, not surprisingly, have demonstrated that experiencing sexist and racist comments increased feelings of discomfort, anger, and depression in minority targets (e.g., women and African Americans; Swim et al., 2001, 2003). These same studies have also demonstrated that hearing another individual make a prejudicial comment leads to negative emotional experiences in non-targets (e.g., men; Swim et al., 2001, 2003). Researchers have also begun to investigate the behavior of the observer towards the perpetrator of the racist remark and the consequences of this behavior. Results indicate that challenging the commenter actually decreases that individual’s prejudice level, through increased self-directed negative affect (Czopp et al., 2003) and feelings of guilt (Fazio & Hilden, 2001), which are critical reactions necessary for prejudice self-regulation (Monteith, 1993). These specific circumstances may also have long-term consequences for the commenter, as shown in a study by Czopp, Monteith, and Mark (2006) that demonstrated that confronting someone about the prejudicial nature of the statement reduces future inappropriate remarks from the commenter. Furthermore, research has shown that if confrontation occurs in
the presence of others, it may lead to decreased public prejudicial behavior and reduced private prejudice in bystanders (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994). Thus, studying the factors that lead people to confront a prejudicial comment may be of particular importance in prejudice reduction for both perpetrators and bystanders.

As our society becomes more conscious about prejudice and as we work towards reducing bias, investigating factors that influence how targets of prejudice confront racist remarks becomes increasingly important. Although, to our knowledge, no studies have specifically investigated non-targets’ behaviors resulting from racist comments, several studies have begun to shed some light on typical behaviors resulting from prejudicial comments. In research examining targets’ likelihood of confronting a prejudicial incident, for example, Swim and Hyers (1999) showed that about 45% of female participants confronted a male confederate who made a sexist comment, although only 15% verbally confronted the man directly. A sociological investigation of discrimination against African American targets found that between 60% to 70% of middle-class Black men experiencing discrimination reported verbally confronting the perpetrator, with responses varying widely from quietly correcting the biased individual to physically retaliating (Feagin, 1991).

Researchers have also investigated specific situational and individual factors that may affect targets’ likelihood of confronting the commenter. Swim and colleagues (2003), for example, demonstrated that targets were more likely to confront the perpetrator when the incident was personally directed at the participant, suggesting that personal investment might play a role in the decision to confront. It is also possible that behavior may be affected by individual differences in prejudice level, such that individuals lower in prejudice are more likely than high prejudice participants to experience negative affect in a situation involving a
prejudicial remark (e.g., Czopp & Monteith, 2003), which may lead them to act in a way consistent with their personal standards (Monteith, 1993). It follows, then, that low-prejudiced individuals, for whom being egalitarian is important, would experience more negative affect after witnessing a biased comment than high-prejudice individuals and would consequently demonstrate stronger confronting behavior than a high-prejudiced individual.

Two studies were designed in order to investigate the real-world behaviors and reactions of non-targets to prejudicial comments made about race. Because previous studies exploring targets’ reactions to prejudicial comments have demonstrated that individuals are not accurate when predicting their reactions to situations involving prejudice (Shelton & Stewart, 2004; Swim & Hyers, 1999; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001), we did not want to rely on hypothetical scenarios, so participants were asked to recall recent situations in their real lives in which they witnessed someone making a prejudicial comment. To accomplish these goals, Study 1 was designed to explore participants’ experiences with these behaviors through self-report questionnaires. In Study 2, participants recorded their experiences with these situations immediately after hearing a prejudicial comment in their everyday lives, with the use of an online diary technique. The ultimate goals of these studies were to identify key situational and individual difference variables that influenced an individual’s confronting or non-confronting behavior, and to design a model predicting confronting behavior for non-targets.

Before conducting these two studies, it was necessary to establish that undergraduate students at our college (who would make up the sample for our studies) in fact witness derogatory comments about racial groups on a regular basis. As described above, previous studies have found that the targets of racist remarks report hearing negative comments about their own racial group often (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993), but no studies to our knowledge
have assessed how often non-targets hear derogatory racial remarks. Thus, we conducted a brief pilot study in which 102 undergraduate students (racial majority and minority members) reported how many racist comments they heard a week about racial outgroups. After removing one outlier who claimed to hear 120 racist comments a week, students reported hearing an average of 8.15 racist comments ($SD = 10.62$) a week, supporting our hypothesis that these types of non-target-directed comments are prevalent with this population.

**Study 1**

The main purpose of Study 1 was to assess how individuals behaved in situations they had recently experienced in which another person had made a negative comment about a racial outgroup. They answered questions about and described their verbal behavior and their personal reactions in response to the comments, as well as the situational factors involved (e.g., how many people were present, who said the remark, etc.). In this study, we sought to identify the most common responses and behaviors that result from hearing a prejudicial remark and to examine potential variables that are associated with different reactions and behaviors to racist comments.

**Method**

**Participants**

Ninety-eight undergraduate students from a liberal arts college participated in this study for partial fulfillment of a course requirement. One participant failed to complete major portions of the questionnaire, so the data are reported from 97 participants (70.2% female). Most participants were White (68.4%), with a smaller portion reporting as students of color (14% Asian, 7% Black, 5.3% Latino, 5.3% other).

**Measures and Procedure**
Participants completed a questionnaire packet in small groups of two to four students. After signing an informed consent form, they completed a written survey. Although we were specifically interested in racial comments, we asked participants to recall two comments they had heard recently that had been made about any social group, so the focus on racist comments would not be as evident. We provided participants with the following examples of social groups: race, gender, sexual orientation, religion. We encouraged the participants to describe situations they had experienced within the last week. After recording each comment, participants described details about the situations in free response form. Specifically, they were asked to include information about who made the comment (e.g., a friend, a stranger, a parent, etc.), the setting in which the comment was made (e.g., a dorm room, a car, a classroom, etc.), their reaction to the comment, how the comment made them feel, and an indication of why they think they reacted in the way that they did.

The open-ended answers were read by two research assistants, who rated participants’ reported description and coded how close the participant was to the commenter (i.e., based on participants’ reporting of who made the comment [friend, relative, etc.], 1=not close at all, 7=very close; α = .62), where the comment took place from 1 = very private to 7 = very public (α = .85). Coders also rated the strength of the participants’ self-reported verbal reactions on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=no reaction to 7=strong reaction; α = .83). These coders also indicated on a 7-point scale to what extent they felt that the participant expressed verbal disagreement with the remark (1=not at all to 7=very much; α = .91). Finally, raters coded the valence of the self-reported overall emotional response reported on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive; α = .92). Because of acceptable reliability levels, raters’ scores for each variable were averaged together.
On 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much), participants also rated the perceived offensiveness of the comment at the time it was said and at present, how strongly they agreed with the remark, and how stressful the situation was for them.

The survey also included measures of individual differences in racial prejudice. All questions used 7-point response scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Although other measures were used, only one was relevant to our research questions and the others will not be reported here. The 20-item Attitudes Towards Blacks Scale (ATB; Brigham, 1993) was included, which has been used extensively as an index of racial bias. Items from the ATB include statements such as “Black and White people are inherently equal” (reverse-coded). Individual items were averaged to form a composite score (with a possible range of 1-7), with higher scores indicating more prejudice ($\alpha = .87$). We also included a set of five statements that were pilot-tested from another undergraduate sample at the same college and were perceived by these students to be (overall) moderately racist in nature with decent variability ($3.84 < M_s < 5.79$ on a 7-point scale; $SD_s > 1.38$). Participants rated how offensive they considered each of the statements (e.g., “I would never want someone in my family to marry a person who is a different race.”) on a 7-point scale (1=not at all offensive; 7=extremely offensive). We calculated the average rating of offensiveness for these five statements, and this served as another individual measure of prejudice ($\alpha = .83$). Lastly, participants provided demographic information.

After completing the survey, participants were given a debriefing form and the opportunity to ask questions. Most participants completed the survey in 20-30 minutes.

**Results**

**Characteristics of Prejudicial Comments**
Research assistants coded the reported prejudicial experiences based on the type of comment. Participants reported prejudicial statements involving race with the most frequency (80; 62.5%), and reported fewer comments involving gender (25; 19.5%) and sexual orientation (23; 18%), $\chi^2(2) = 49.05, p < .001$. There were also 17 comments reported about religion, 6 about political views, 3 regarding handicapped individuals, and 3 remarks about size. Comments that were identified as race-related were selected for the analyses. If a participant reported more than one racial comment, the first one was chosen for analysis. Comments were excluded if they were directed towards the participant’s social group, as we were only interested in non-targets’ experiences. Finally, only negative comments were included. A total of 56 eligible racial comments were used in the following analyses. All analyses were conducted with all participants included and with minority participants excluded; results were the same in both cases so results are reported with all 56 participants.

Participants reported a variety of racial comments, ranging from stereotypical comments about a group to extremely hostile remarks. Most of the comments were about Blacks, although there were a handful of prejudicial remarks regarding Whites, Asians, and Latinos. Some examples of typical racist comments reported are “Black people are dumb and creepy” and “I think that all Black people should get in a car together and go to hell.” Since this study took place within a few months of the 2008 presidential election, there were also a variety of racist comments about the election, such as “Barack Obama is a stupid nigger” and “you can’t put a Black man in the White House.”

Examination of participants’ descriptions of the situation in which the prejudicial comment took place demonstrated that most of the prejudicial comments were reportedly made by friends (57.81%) or acquaintances (33.59%), with the few remaining remarks made by
strangers, family members, or authority figures such as teachers and coaches. A majority of the comments were made in a private setting such as a house, dorm, or car (60.94%), whereas the rest were witnessed in a public place such as a bar or party (20.31%) or during class or work.

**Responses to Prejudicial Comments**

**Ratings of offensiveness.** On average, participants perceived the comments to be mildly offensive at the time they were said ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.91$). Results indicated a significant difference between participants’ ratings of offensiveness at the time the comment was said ($M = 4.57$) and at present ($M = 5.20$), such that participants considered the comment to be more prejudicial at the time of the study than when the comment was said, $t(55) = -3.45, p < .01$.

**Verbal confronting behavior.** As described above, verbal reaction refers to coded responses of how strongly participants exhibited verbal confronting behavior. Generally, these ratings indicated that most participants had minimal verbal reactions to the comments ($M = 1.71, SD = 1.06$); in fact, the mode for verbal reaction was 1.00, which was the code for “no verbal reaction.” Of the 56 coded verbal reactions to the comments, 32 indicated no verbal reaction, 19 indicated confrontation (e.g., explanations as to the inaccuracy of the comment), and two were statements of agreement. Three participants also reported changing the topic of conversation.

Coders also rated expressed verbal disagreement with the remark ($M = 2.90, SD = 2.03$). An example of a comment that was rated as high in expressed verbal disagreement (i.e., 7) was “I said that is not true and people shouldn’t make generalizations like that based on one person.” A higher degree of expressed disagreement toward the commenter was significantly associated with participants’ ratings of greater offensiveness (see Table 1).
Responses to Racist Comments

Results also yielded a significant negative correlation between setting (with higher coded ratings indicating a more public setting) and verbal response, $r = -.29$, $p < .05$, indicating that participants had stronger verbal reactions in more private settings.

**Affective reactions.** Participants’ free responses indicating how they felt at the time the prejudicial comment was said showed that participants felt indifferent (8), angry (5), uncomfortable (9), shocked (9), happy (5), hurt (3), offended (3), annoyed (3), or disgusted (2). The coded valence of affective responses ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.12$) was negatively correlated with participants’ ratings of how offensive they perceived the comment to be, $r = -.59$, $p < .001$, such that the more offensive the participants rated the comment, the more negatively they felt emotionally after the comment was said. As expected, the more negative the emotional response, the greater the extent of expressed verbal disagreement (see Table 1). In addition, affect was positively correlated with a coded rating of the commenter’s closeness to the participant (i.e., friend, relative, etc.) with more negative emotions reported for comments said by individuals with whom the participant was closer ($r = .27$, $p < .05$).

Self-reported stressfulness of the situation ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.81$) was highly correlated with offensiveness of the comment ($r = .71$, $p < .001$), in that the more offensive the comment, the more stress participants experienced. Stress was also correlated with coded verbal disagreement ($r = .31$, $p < .05$), in that the more stressful the experience, the more verbal disagreement they expressed to the commenter. Self-reported personal agreement with the racist comment ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.57$) was negatively correlated with the offensiveness rating of the comment ($r = -.44$, $p < .01$) and how stressful it was to hear the comment ($r = -.29$, $p < .05$), such that the more offensive participants rated the comment and experienced stress when they heard it, the less likely they were to personally agree with the comment. Personal agreement was also
marginally negatively correlated with expressed verbal disagreement ($r = -.24$, $p = .083$), although this correlation was not statistically significant.

**Self-Reported Prejudice**

Participants generally reported egalitarian values, which is typical with a college sample, with ATB scores ranging from 1.05 - 4.20 with a mean of 2.44 ($SD = 0.69$). ATB was negatively correlated with verbal response (see Table 1), such that lower prejudiced participants reported stronger confronting behavior. In addition, ATB score was negatively correlated with coders’ ratings of how upset the participants seemed from their self-reported descriptions of their emotions ($r = -.31, p < .05$); the lower participants were in self-reported prejudice, the more likely they were to be upset after the prejudicial comment.

Recall that, in addition to the ATB, participants also rated a series of prejudicial comments on how offensive they considered the statements to be, yielding another composite score. Scores ranged from 1.38 to 6.81, with a mean of 5.14 ($SD = 1.15$). This measure correlated negatively with ATB scores, $r = -.56, p < .001$, such that lower prejudiced participants rated the statements as more offensive than higher prejudiced participants. This measure was also positively correlated with the coders’ rating of verbal response ($r = .33, p < .05$) and self-reported post-comment stress ($r = .27, p < .05$). That is, participants rating the pre-tested comments as more offensive reported more strongly confronting the commenter and experiencing more stress as a result of the comment.

**INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE**

**Discussion**

In Study 1, participants described their reactions and behaviors in a situation when an individual made a racist comment in their presence. Participants reported a range of racial
responses to racist comments, although most were disparaging racist jokes or comments about African Americans as a group. Most of these comments were made by participants’ friends and acquaintances in private settings (e.g., dorm rooms, houses). This finding is consistent with research examining targets’ experiences with prejudicial remarks that demonstrates that prejudicial comments are mostly made by familiar others (e.g., Ayres, Friedman, & Leaper, 2009).

Although there was also variability in verbal responses resulting from the racist comments, most participants (57%) indicated that they said nothing in response to the racist remark. Overall, 34% of our non-target participants indicated that they verbally confronted the perpetrator, which is slightly lower than similar research examining targets of prejudice (e.g., Ayres et al., 2009). These low levels of confronting may be due to the potentially negative social costs of confronting (Dodd, Giuliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). Research with targets of prejudice, for example, has demonstrated that individuals may be worried that if they confront, they will be disliked by bystanders, labeled as complainers, or retaliated against (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). In the case of non-targets, these individuals may be less educated about prejudice or have less experience with prejudice than targets and thus may not be sure how to confront in these situations (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008).

Another goal of this study was to examine specific variables that predicted confronting behavior. Self-reported perceived offensiveness of the comment at the time it was said was an important predictor variable. Participants’ coded responses revealed that more negative affective reactions and higher stress levels were associated with higher ratings of comment offensiveness. Higher perceived offensiveness and more negative emotional reactions in turn predicted the expression of verbal disagreement. The setting in which the comment was experienced also seemed to affect behavior, in that participants reported stronger verbal reactions in more private
settings. Participants may have felt less comfortable verbalizing their reactions in a more public situation in which more people were present due to greater social costs of confronting (Stangor, Swim, Van Allen, & Sechrist, 2002).

Despite the fact that most participants reported low levels of prejudice, there was still a significant relationship between prejudice level and verbal response such that those lower in prejudice more strongly verbally reprimanded the commenter. Low-prejudice participants also reported more negative emotions and higher stress levels during the encounter than high-prejudice participants. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that for participants low in prejudice for whom it is important to hold egalitarian values, experiencing a situation involving a prejudicial comment induces greater negative affect (Czopp & Monteith, 2003) and leads to a stronger verbal reaction (Monteith, 2003).

Participants also reported that they considered the prejudicial comment to be more offensive at the time of the survey than at the time the comment was said. This may provide some insight into the overall lack of confrontation reported by our sample. If participants did not perceive the comment as offensive at the time it was said, it may not have induced enough negative affect to lead to a confrontation (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Monteith, 1993). It remains unclear, however, whether the participants reflected on the comment later on their own and deemed it to be more offensive at that time, or if participating in this study forced them to reconsider that the comment might have been more offensive than they initially thought. More research needs to examine this phenomenon; studying this issue more closely may help us understand the reasons why non-targets may confront (or fail to confront) a prejudicial remark at the time it is said.
Taken together, the results from Study 1 demonstrate that non-targets often hear negative racial comments said by a close friend or acquaintance, varying in perceived offensiveness. Although there are a range of behavioral and affective reactions, many perceivers say or do nothing when in this situation. Consistent with theories of prejudice regulation (e.g., Monteith, 1993), the more offensive the racial comment is perceived and the more negative the affective reaction to the offensive comment, the more strongly one will confront the commenter.

Although Study 1 provides valuable insight into people’s experiences with situations involving racial remarks, there are some limitations to this study. First of all, participants were asked to recall their behaviors and personal feelings in response to situations that may have happened a great deal of time before they participated in the study. Although we asked them to recall “recent” events, we had no control over when the reported events occurred. Thus, some participants may have been inaccurate in reporting correctly the details of the incident, such as their affective reactions to the comment. To address this issue, Study 2 was designed to allow participants to report on situations only hours after they experienced it, allowing us to be more confident that participants were recalling events and reactions as accurately as possible.

Secondly, most of our participants in Study 1 were female, which limits the generalizability of our findings and did not allow us to examine potential gender effects. Previous research has established that males tend to be more tolerant of prejudicial comments than females; that is, women are less accepting of racist, heterosexist, and sexist hate speech, compared to men (Cowan & Mettrick, 2002; Craig & Waldo, 1996; Hunter & McClelland, 1991; Inman & Baron, 1996) and tend to have lower levels of prejudice against social groups (Cowan & Hodge, 1996; Herek, 1988) than do men. Although it may be hypothesized that this would lead women to confront more than men, there are other factors that may lead women to be less likely to
confront. For example, confronting may violate the gender role that women should be passive (Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998). Thus, no specific hypotheses were generated, and recruiting similar numbers of male and female participants for Study 2 was done for exploratory reasons. Finally, the second study was also designed to further examine how affective responses are related to behavior. In Study 1, we asked participants in a free-response format to indicate which emotions they experienced during the situation. We found preliminary evidence that the more negative the affective reaction, the more strongly participants confronted the commenter. However, in Study 1, affect was limited to a variable coded by research assistants. For Study 2, we wanted to tease out specific negative emotions as predictors and thus included items asking participants to rate the extent to which they felt specific negative emotions during the situation.

**Study 2**

Study 2 was designed to use a different methodology to investigate the factors involved in confronting behavior by getting at “fresh” events that had happened within a day or two, to accurately investigate participants’ reactions to racial remarks. This study was designed as a diary study and took place over a one-week period in which participants were instructed to go about their normal daily lives, but to pay attention to situations in which they witnessed an individual making a prejudicial comment. They were told to log on to a secure website and answer a set of questions about the situation within several hours of the incident. In this way, we attempted to get a more accurate representation of real-life situations involving racial remarks.

The diary study also included a more detailed set of questions and utilized scale measures in order to assess different aspects of the situation that we were unable to analyze in Study 1. For example, we included a list of emotions and asked participants to rate the extent to which they felt each emotion after the comment was said. The specific emotions included were taken from
the most common emotions participants identified feeling in Study 1. We expected to replicate our findings from the first study that the participants experiencing the most negative affect, specifically stress, anger, and hurt, would confront the commenter most strongly.

In Study 2, participants also rated situational factors that may have affected their behaviors; that is, social influence (Blanchard et al., 1991; Blanchard, Lilly, & Vaughn, 1991) and specific motivations for behavioral responses (e.g., educating the commenter) were measured. We also created a list of specific behaviors taken from the free responses of participants in Study 1 and asked participants to rate the extent to which their behavior was consistent with each confronting action (e.g., laughing, expressing surprise, expressing how they felt, etc.). This was done to examine how specific behaviors were predicted by situational and individual factors and we hypothesized that stronger confronting behavior would be predicted by a more negative emotional reaction and a higher offensiveness rating of the comment. Because self-reported prejudice level (ATB; Brigham, 1993) predicted confronting behavior in Study 1, participants also completed the ATB to continue to explore the relationship between individual differences and confronting behavior.

Finally, we wanted to examine the outcome of the situation from the non-target’s perspective. That is, we sought to explore the relationship between behavior in response to a prejudicial comment and the resulting evaluative experience. We hypothesized that confronting the commenter more strongly would lead to more positive feelings about the situation. This hypothesis is based on cognitive consistency theories that support the expectation that stronger confronters would experience more positive affect because their behavior would be more consistent with their attitude than non-confronters (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Heider, 1958).

Method
Participants

Sixty-seven (32 male, 35 female) undergraduate students from a liberal arts college participated in this study for partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Of those who reported their race, a majority of the participants were White (61.19%), although there were several minorities; specifically, there were Asian (16.42%), Black (11.94%), Latino (4.48%), and bi-racial (2.99%) participants.

Materials and Procedure

Participants signed up for this study online and were initially brought into a classroom in groups of 15-20 students for a 10-minute instructional session where they were given relevant information about the online measures. All questions were answered and participants signed an informed consent form. Participants logged in to the online survey website Opinio (www.objectplanet.com/opinio/) with their school ID and password, which provided us with information about who completed the survey but kept the data separate from participant information. On the first day, participants completed a 30 minute survey in which they provided demographic information (i.e., race, gender, age) and completed the Attitudes Towards Blacks Scale (ATB; Brigham, 1993). As with Study 1, questions on the prejudice scale used a Likert-type 7-point scale, with the minimum indicating “strongly disagree” and the maximum point indicating “strongly agree.” Total scores on the prejudice scale were obtained by reverse coding appropriate items, and then averaging all items together ($\alpha = .87$). Higher scores indicated more racial prejudice. In order not to arouse suspicion as to the true purpose of this study, these items were embedded in a long questionnaire with a variety of filler items.

After completing Part I, participants were sent an email that contained a link to the rest of the survey. Participants were instructed to go about their daily lives as usual, but to pay attention
to comments they heard around them that were prejudicial in nature. Even though we were interested in racial comments specifically, we kept these instructions broad so as not to alert participants that we were studying racial prejudice in particular. During the week, when they heard a prejudicial comment, participants accessed the online survey where they reported the exact comment, who made the comment, where it was said, and how many people were around; as in Study 1, these were open-ended questions. Also, as in Study 1, participants indicated their emotional, verbal, and non-verbal reactions to the remark in an open-ended format; all open-ended questions were coded the same way as in Study 1. There were also several new closed-ended questions designed from the most common responses in Study 1. Specifically, on 7-point rating scales, participants indicated how strongly they engaged in the following actions (1=not at all; 7=very much): agreed with the remark, expressed disagreement, laughed, told the source the remark was offensive, pursued a conversation about the comment, expressed surprise, expressed how they felt, and switched the topic of conversation. Emotional reactions were assessed by asking participants to rate the valence of their emotional reaction on a 7-point scale from very negative to very positive, and by asking participants to indicate how angered, hurt, and offended they felt after the comment was said (1=not at all; 7=very much). Participants also indicated how strongly they personally agreed and disagreed with the comment.

Participants also answered questions pertaining to reasons and motives for how they responded to the comment. The options were taken from common responses to prejudicial remarks reported in Study 1. On 7-point scales, participants rated how true the following statements were (1=not true at all, 7=extremely true): “I wanted the person who made the remark to know that I disagreed with what they said,” “I wanted the person who made this remark to know I agreed with what they said,” “I wanted the other people present to know I disagreed with
what was said,” and “I wanted the other people present to know I agreed with what was said.” In addition, a number of “excuses” were offered that participants rated to indicate how strongly they pertained to their behavior; specifically, participants indicated how true it was that they didn’t think the comment was serious, couldn’t think of the right thing to say or do, didn’t think that saying or doing anything would make a difference, didn’t want to start an argument, felt it would be impolite to say or do anything, didn’t want to offend the source, worried about retaliation, and worried about what people would think. Finally, participants indicated on seven-point scales (1=not at all; 7=extremely) how satisfied they were with their response to the remark and how good they felt about how they responded.

Over the course of the week, participants answered the above questions for two different comments they heard. Since it was not specified what type of prejudicial comment the study was assessing, including two comments increased the likelihood that participants would report at least one racist comment. Instructions indicated that they should access the online survey as soon as possible after the comment was made, be as truthful as possible, and record exactly what happened as opposed to what they wished had happened. At the end of the survey, participants reported how many racist, sexist, and heterosexist comments they heard over the course of the week as well as how often they heard prejudicial comments made by others about race, gender, and sexual orientation in general (1 = not at all; 7 = very often). After the participants had completed the entire survey, they were provided with debriefing information and given the experimenter’s contact information.

Results

Characteristics of Prejudicial Comments
Consistent with the findings of Study 1, participants indicated that they heard comments regarding race ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.23$) more often than gender ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.41$) or sexual orientation ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.79$), $F(2, 96) = 9.81, p < .001, \varepsilon^2 = .17$. Only race-related negative comments not directed towards the participant were included. If participants reported more than one racist comment, the first comment was chosen. Due to these restrictions, the data reported here are from 49 comments from the same number of participants. These participants represented the original sample in terms of gender (24 female, 25 male), race (28 White, 10 Asian, 6 Black, 2 Biracial, 1 Hispanic, 1 “Other”), and sexual orientation (48 heterosexual, 1 bisexual).

After removing two outliers who reported hearing over 100 comments per week, participants reported that they had heard an average of 8.83 ($SD = 11.30$) racist comments over the course of the week. Male participants indicated hearing many more racist comments per week ($M = 12.13$, $SD = 15.20$) than female participants ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 3.63$), $t(45) = -2.03, p < .05$. Of the reported comments in which the gender of the individual making the comment was identified, 63.3% ($n = 31$) were made by a man and 36.7% ($n = 18$) were made by a woman. Male participants were more likely to report racist comments said by men ($n = 20$) than by women ($n = 5$), $X^2 = 9.00, p < .01$; women were equally likely to hear racist comments said by men ($n = 11$) and women ($n = 13$), $X^2 = .17, ns$. Most comments were made by Whites (39; 79.6%), whereas the rest (10; 20.4%) were made by individuals of color. At the time the comment was said, participants reported that an average of 3.98 ($SD = 3.25$) people were present.

**Responses to Prejudicial Comments**

Participants were asked about their personal reactions to the comments directly after they were spoken. Participants rated the remarks as having a moderate overall level of offensiveness ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.97$) and a low average level of stress was reported in response to witnessing
the remark ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.49$). On average, participants indicated a low level of personal agreement with the remarks ($M = 2.52, SD = 1.81$), and reported low levels of feeling angry ($M = 3.39, SD = 2.24$), hurt ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.93$), and offended ($M = 3.06, SD = 2.04$). Unlike in Study 1, participants did not consider the comment more offensive at the time of the survey ($M = 4.57$) than they had at the time it was said ($M = 4.24$), $t(48) = -1.66$, $p = .10$.

Verbal confronting behavior. In general, participants indicated low levels of verbal reactions to the source of the comment (explicitly saying it was offensive: $M = 2.37, SD = 2.19$; pursuing a conversation about remark: $M = 2.12, SD = 1.78$; stating surprise: $M = 2.84, SD = 2.27$; expressing how the remark made him/her feel: $M = 3.19, SD = 2.26$). These variables were all significantly intercorrelated, $r_s > 0.38$, $ps < .001$. Of the 49 comments, 29 indicated no verbal reaction, 16 indicated confrontation (e.g., explanations as to the inaccuracy of the comment), and four were statements of agreement. As with Study 1, independent coders in this study read through participants’ behavioral responses and rated expressed disagreement. Raters’ evaluations of these behaviors were strongly correlated with participants’ own ratings of the strength of their expressed verbal disagreement ($r = .80, p < .001$), so participants’ responses were used as an assessment of verbal confronting behavior and all analyses were conducted with participants’ self-reported answers. Specifically, self-reported strength of verbal confrontation was used as the measure of verbal confronting behavior in Study 2.

There was no difference between female and male participants’ verbal confronting behavior, $t(47) = 0.19$, $ns$. Ratings of strength of verbal disagreement were significantly correlated with the perceived offensiveness of the comment (see Table 1), such that the more participants perceived the comment to be offensive, the more they expressed verbal disagreement. The more angered and hurt the participants reported feeling after the comment was
said, the more verbal disagreement they expressed (rs = .68, .57, ps < .001). Verbal confronting behavior was not significantly correlated with ATB score (see Table 1).

We also examined the reasons why people reported behaving the way they did in response to the comments and how these personal motivations predicted confronting behavior. Participants exhibited more verbal confronting behavior the more strongly they wanted to let the commenter know they disagreed with the remark (r = .86, p < .001), the more they wanted to educate the commenter (r = .60, p < .001), and the more they wanted to discourage these types of comments in the future (r = .72, p < .001). Strength of the verbal confrontation was also significantly positively correlated with feelings of social pressure to say or do something in response (r = .50, p < .001) and feeling personally threatened (r = .52, p < .001). Some gender differences emerged in participants’ motivations for confronting. Men (M = 2.56, SD = 1.73) were more likely to report that their behavior was motivated by a fear that someone would retaliate if they confronted than women (M = 1.75, SD = 1.15), although this difference failed to reach significance, t(47) = -1.92, p = .06. Females’ confronting behavior was significantly related to how personally threatened they felt by the comment, r = .48, p < .05, although these two variables were unrelated for male participants, r = .30, ns. We also examined the level of “excuses” that participants made for their behavior and only two significant correlations emerged between agreement with the “excuses” statements and confronting behavior. Specifically, participants reported less confronting behavior the more they thought the commenter was not being serious (r = -.52, p < .001) and the more they thought it would make no difference if they confronted (r = -.33, p < .05).

Another purpose of this study was to examine how confronting behavior predicted individuals’ perceptions of the situation after it was over. Overall, strength of verbal
confrontation was positively correlated with how much impact participants felt they had on the commenter, $r = .35, p < .05$, such that participants who confronted felt they had more impact on the commenter than those who did not confront. Strength of verbal response was significantly correlated with how good participants reported feeling with their response, $r = .47, p < .01$ and how satisfied they were with their behavior, $r = .37, p < .01$; those who confronted felt better about their behavior than those who did not. For women, the relationships between strength of verbal response and feeling good, feeling satisfied, and having an impact on the commenter were strong and significant ($rs = .42, .44, .64$, respectively; $ps < .05$), but none of these correlations were significant for men, ($rs < .38, ns$).

In the above analyses, the dependent variable of interest was strength of confronting behavior, not likelihood of confronting behavior. In order to examine whether the same variables were related to the decision to confront, the predictor variables analyzed above were subjected to a series of independent $t$-tests comparing situations in which participants reported verbal confrontation to those in which participants did not confront. Results revealed that participants who confronted rated the comments as more offensive ($M = 6.00, SD = 1.35$) than those who did not confront ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.78$), $t(47) = -4.40, p < .001$. Participants who confronted were more angered and hurt ($Ms > 4.15$) than those who did not confront ($Ms < 2.70$), $ts > 3.66, ps < .01$. Confronters were more likely to report wanting to educate the confronter, wanting to let the commenter to know they disagreed, and wanting others to know they disagreed ($Ms > 5.23$) than those who did not confront ($Ms < 2.97$), $ts > 3.47, ps < .01$. Finally, participants who confronted felt more personally threatened ($M = 2.77, SD = 1.78$) than those who did not confront ($M = 1.53, SD = 0.94$), $t(47) = -3.16, p < .01$. No other analyses were significant.

**Self-Report Prejudice Scales**
Scores on the ATB (Brigham, 1993) were positively skewed (i.e., higher scores indicate more prejudice), with a range from 1.30 to 4.80 ($M = 2.67, SD = 0.79$). Unlike in Study 1, ATB scores were not significantly correlated with verbal confronting behavior ($r = -.19, ns$). Scores on the ATB were positively correlated with expressing agreement with the racist comment ($r = .38, p < .01$), laughing at the racist remark ($r = .33, p < .05$), and experiencing positive emotions after the comment ($r = .42, p < .01$). Scores were negatively correlated with negative emotions experienced after the comment, such that the lower the prejudice, the more angered ($r = -.28, p < .05$), hurt ($r = -.32, p < .05$), and offended ($r = -.42, p < .01$) participants were in response to the comment. Significant gender differences emerged for ATB score, such that females ($M = 2.34, SD = .63$) scored lower than males ($M = 2.90, SD = .86$), $t(47) = -2.19, p < .05$.

**Regression Analysis**

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the extent to which different factors predicted participants’ confronting behavior (i.e., strength of verbal confrontation). The first variable was the perceived offensiveness of the comment, which was self-reported. Secondly, a combined measure of personal affective reactions to the comment was used, which was created by averaging measures of how hurt and angered participants had been at the comment; these emotions were chosen because they were most predictive of confronting behavior. Finally, gender was entered as an independent variable. To examine how gender interacted with each of the other predictor variables, interaction terms were created by multiplying gender by the mean-centered variables offensiveness and affective reaction. The main effects were entered in the first step of the regression and the interaction terms were entered in the second step. The dependent variable used in the analysis was self-reported strength of verbal confronting behavior.
The overall model was significant, adjusted $R^2 = .28$, $F(5, 43) = 7.47$, $p < .001$, with emotions ($\beta = 1.35$, $t = 4.77$, $p < .001$) and offensiveness rating ($\beta = -1.08$, $t = -2.74$, $p < .01$) as significant predictors. There was a significant interaction between offensiveness and gender, $\beta = 1.14$, $t(45) = 3.04$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 1). For female participants, offensiveness did not predict behavior ($simple slope = 0.18$, $t(45) = 1.12$, ns). For male participants, however, ratings of offensiveness were significantly correlated with behavior ($simple slope = 0.49$, $t(45) = 2.78$, $p < .01$). There was also a significant interaction between affective response and gender, $\beta = -0.90$, $t(45) = -3.38$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 2). For female participants, affective response predicted strength of confrontation ($simple slope = 0.54$, $t(45) = 3.47$, $p < .01$). For male participants, affective response was not related to behavior ($simple slope = 0.28$, $t(45) = 1.47$, ns).

### Discussion

Study 2 allowed for an in-depth analysis of non-targets’ reactions and reported behaviors in recent situations involving racist comments. The results of this study were consistent with the results of Study 1 in the content of comments, situational factors, and responses reported. Also consistent with the results of Study 1, strength of confrontation was stronger when the racial comment was judged to be highly offensive and yielded a negative emotional response. Results also indicated much stronger correlations between specific emotions (i.e., anger, hurt) and reported behaviors than those in Study 1 that only examined general affective response.

Results revealed that personal motivations also were related to confronting behavior. In particular, participants more strongly verbally confronted the commenter the more they felt threatened, and the more they wanted to educate the commenter and discourage similar remarks in the future. Stronger confronting behavior was also associated with feeling more social
pressure to confront. These results suggest that the presence of others as well as personal motivations is related to participants’ behavior.

Study 2 also allowed us to examine variables involved in the decision to confront. Results indicated that the decision to confront differed between situations in which participants confronted versus those in which they did not. That is, the offensiveness of the comment, negative affect, and the desire to let people know they disagreed with the comment were predictive of whether individuals confronted.

Self-reported prejudice was also further examined as a predictor of confronting behavior. Those lower in prejudice were more angry, hurt, and offended as a result of the racist comments, but, unlike Study 1, prejudice level was unrelated to verbal confrontation. However, individuals higher in prejudice expressed more agreement, laughed more, and experienced more positive emotions than those lower in prejudice.

The analyses also yielded interesting gender differences in the relationships between predictor variables and confronting behavior, such that females’ confronting behavior was tied more closely with their emotions. For males, however, confronting behavior was predicted by the perceived offensiveness of the comment itself. Finally, our hypothesis that participants who confronted more would feel better about their behavior was supported.

**General Discussion**

Across two studies, this research provided an examination of non-targets’ behaviors and reactions to 105 racist comments. It was very clear from the current findings that hearing racist comments is not just a common experience for targets of prejudice (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993), but that non-targets also often witness a multitude of negative racial remarks as well. These findings support previous investigations that have suggested that the college campus may
be a particularly ripe environment for experiencing prejudicial comments about various minority groups (Burn, 2000; D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Dickter, 2010; Plummer, 2001; Thurlow, 2001; Swim et al., 2003). In the current research, many of the racist comments heard by non-targets were made by White males in private settings with a small number of people around, and targeted African-Americans as a group. Despite the large number of people who reported being upset or angry in response to the comments, many participants indicated that they did not confront the individual who made the prejudicial comment (61% in Study 1; 59% in Study 2). This result is in line with previous experimental research on targets’ experiences with prejudicial comments; that is, although people may have negative personal reactions to comments directed toward their social group, only a small number actually directly confront the perpetrator (e.g., Swim & Hyers, 1999).

Many participants failed to confront a commenter who made a racist statement. However, there were a variety of behavioral responses and certain individual and situational factors that consistently emerged as being predictive of confronting behavior. Previous researchers have suggested that in order for individuals to confront a prejudicial remark, they first have to label it as such (e.g., Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008), as participants had to do in the current study. The current findings also suggest that, after participants label a remark as prejudicial, how offensive the prejudicial comment is perceived may predict confronting behavior. That is, the more offensive the participants rated the comment, the more strongly they confronted the commenter. This result suggests that future examinations of confronting behavior should examine perceived offensiveness of the comment as a predictor variable; past research using diary study (Swim et al., 2001; 2003) or experimental methods (Swim & Hyers, 1999) have not included this variable. However, recent research on non-targets’ responses to heterosexist comments supports the
findings in the current study that the perceived offensiveness of the comment is related to confronting behavior (Dickter, 2010). The perceived offensiveness of the comment may be particularly important to males. That is, regression analyses in Study 2 showed that offensiveness was a significant predictor of behavior for male participants, but not for female participants. Although this result was not hypothesized, it may be explained by Study 2’s findings that male participants heard more prejudicial comments than female participants. Due to a constant exposure to prejudicial language (Burn, 2000), male participants may simply be more habituated to racist comments and thus only confront when the comments reach a certain threshold of offensiveness.

More negative emotional responses to the comments were associated with strength of confrontation. Specifically, the more stressed, angered, and hurt participants were, the more strongly they verbally confronted the commenter. Regression analyses in Study 2 indicated that, for females, affective reactions significantly predicted verbal confronting behavior whereas this was not the case for males. This finding is consistent with cultural rules about the appropriate expression of emotions by women and men (e.g., Buck et al., 1992; Ekman & Friesen, 1969). That is, because women in American culture have been socialized to believe that it is acceptable to attend to and express emotions whereas this is not the case for men (Briton & Hall, 1995; Fivush, 1998), experienced emotion and expressed behavior may be positively related for women but not men. Additional support for this idea comes from research showing that women devote more resources to the conscious processing of emotions, which researchers suggest may be related to the more overt expression of emotions in behavior by women relative to men (Knyazev, Slobodskoj-Plusnin, & Bocharov, 2010). Although the gender differences in the current research are preliminary and explanations for these findings are tentative, Study 2’s
results highlight the importance of continuing to investigate gender as a factor in confronting research, as it may be instrumental in designing prejudice reduction and education programs.

Additional interesting gender differences were found in how non-target men and women experience and perpetrate situations involving racist remarks. Consistent with past research (Ayres et al., 2009; Swim et al., 2001), men were more likely to be the perpetrators of the racist comments than women were. In addition, men heard many more racist comments every week than women did, which may be the result of male college students consistently using prejudicial language in inappropriate ways in their peer groups (see Burn, 2000). These results may be related to gender differences in self-reported prejudice, which was found in the current studies and has been demonstrated in previous research (e.g., Herek, 1988). Although it was predicted that prejudice level, as indicated by self-reported ATB score, would predict confronting behavior, this was only the case in Study 1. Previous research has suggested that individuals low in prejudice are more likely to feel self-directed negative affect in a situation involving prejudice (Czopp et al., 2003), and thus may be motivated to reduce that negative affect by confronting the commenter (Monteith, 1993). Our results are consistent with this idea, in that low-prejudice participants reported experiencing more negative affect directly after the comment was said than high-prejudice participants in both studies. In Study 2, higher levels of prejudice did lead to stronger positive behaviors, such as expressing agreement with the commenter and laughing at the comment, consistent with hypotheses. Our study was limited in that we had little variance in our self-reported prejudice measure, in that participants reported very low levels of racism. Although our hypotheses were partially supported, more research should examine the relationship between prejudice, affect, and confronting behavior by recruiting a more diverse sample with varying levels of racial prejudice. Another possible explanation for the differences
in relationships between prejudice level and behavior in the two studies may have been due to procedural differences between the two studies. Participants in Study 1 filled out the ATB after providing information about the prejudicial comments, whereas in Study 2, they filled out the racism questionnaire prior to reporting their experiences. In Study 1, then, it may be possible that participants’ responses on the racism scale were influenced by their responses to the first part of the study. Since participants in Study 2 filled out the racism scale at least a day before they filled out the rest of the measures, it is unlikely that their responses on the items were related in this way. However, it is important to note that, despite procedural differences between the two studies, ratings on the self-reported measure across the two studies were extremely similar in their descriptive properties.

The current research also allowed us to examine potential personal motivations non-targets may have when deciding whether to confront, and how these motivations might relate to confronting behavior. Although we were examining how motivation may predict confronting behavior, it is important to remember that participants reported on these motivations after the situation had occurred and need to be interpreted cautiously. In Study 2, participants more strongly confronted the more they wanted to educate the commenter and discourage these types of comments in the future. There was also a relationship between social pressure and confronting, such that participants expressed more verbal confrontation the more social pressure they felt to say or do something in response to the comment, supporting previous research demonstrating the importance of social influence as a situational factor in circumstances involving expressed racial attitudes (Blanchard et al., 1991, 1994).

The results from Study 2 also suggested that the same factors that predicted the strength of verbal confronting behavior were also instrumental in participants’ decision to confront. That
is, participants were more likely to confront when they perceived the comment to be offensive, when they had negative emotion reactions, and when they were motivated to let the commenter or others know that they disagreed. What were some of the reasons why participants did not confront? Researchers have suggested that people may discount the severity of the offensive behavior to the extent that the comment was unintentional (e.g., Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). The findings of Study 2 support this idea in that participants confronted less strongly when they rated the commenter as not being serious in their statement. The results of this study also support a stress and coping perspective put forth by Kaiser and Miller (2001), which suggests that confronting is a coping mechanism that people use to reduce stress when faced with discrimination. Although this model was designed for targets of discrimination, the non-targets in the current studies who experienced more stress as a result of the prejudicial comments confronted more strongly. This model also suggests that if individuals have negative expectancies about how effective their confrontation would be, they confront less strongly (Kaiser and Miller, 2004). Results from Study 2 demonstrated that participants who reported less confronting behavior were more likely to think that confronting would not make a difference, providing behavioral support for this theory. Previous work has also suggested that optimism as a personality variable may play a role in deciding how effective confronting would be. That is, optimists who are high in egalitarianism may be particularly likely to use confrontation as a coping mechanism (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Sechrist, 2010; Wellman, Czopp, & Geers, 2009). Although we did not measure optimism in the current study, future research should examine this relationship as it applies to non-targets. Other personality variables that should continue to be explored in confronting research are implicit personality theories; research has demonstrated, for example, that individuals who are incremental theorists (i.e., who believe that personality is
malleable; Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997) are more likely to confront prejudice than those who believe personality is fixed (Rattan & Dweck, 2010). Although the majority of research in this area has focused on situational factors, this research points to the importance of studying individual factors as well.

We also examined non-targets’ perceptions about how positively they felt about the situation after it occurred. The more strongly participants verbally confronted, the more satisfied they felt about their actions, and the more they reported having an impact on the commenter. This finding is consistent with research conducted with targets of discrimination, in that targets who confront the perpetrator have a more positive self-image (Swim & Hyers, 1999), and feel a greater sense of closure (Hyers, 2007) than those who do not confront. The relationship between confronting behavior and satisfaction in Study 2 was strong for female participants, but was not significant for male participants, although confronting behavior was equally likely with men and women. This finding is consistent with the gender differences discussed above, which support the idea that the link between behavior and affect may be stronger in women than in men.

There are several limitations of the current research. First, our studies relied on self-reported behavior and emotions. It may be the case that our participants were misremembering or misreporting details about the situation. However, across the two studies we used two methods of data collection (i.e., paper-and-pencil and online diary), and asked participants to report about situations that had recently occurred to minimize memory bias. Although our results were consistent across the two studies, it is important to interpret the results with caution and to use different data collection methods to corroborate these results. However, we feel that using self-report was an important strength of the current set of studies in examining this particular topic. That is, previous investigations of targets’ confronting behavior using experimental paradigms
have measured participants’ reactions and behaviors to strangers’ prejudicial comments in an artificial setting (e.g., Swim & Hyers, 1999; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001), where the current results suggest that prejudicial comments made by close others in a small group are much more frequent. Thus, the situational and individual factors identified here as predictors of confronting behavior may be closer to real-world situations than those determined by experimental studies. An important direction for future research would be to further examine whether the factors that influence confronting differ based on the closeness of the commenter and the setting, as the results from Study 1 suggest. This work should also be extended to different populations. Confronting behavior and experiences with racist comments may differ substantially with individuals with different levels of education, socioeconomic status, and age.

Conclusion

This research explored the variables that may affect a non-target individual’s behavior in a situation where another individual has made a prejudicial comment about a racial group. Despite great strides in racial attitudes over the last several decades, our studies have shown that hearing derogatory racial comments is unfortunately a common occurrence for college students. Our research has demonstrated that, although prejudicial comments may offend and upset people, few are actually willing to confront the biased individual, even though taking a stand may leave them feeling better about the interaction. It is important to investigate factors that lead to people’s decision to confront (or not to confront) a person who has made a prejudicial comment, as confronting a biased individual has been shown to result in prejudice reduction, and non-targets’ confronting behavior may be especially effective in reducing prejudice (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). The current research has begun to shed some light on some of the individual and situational factors that lead non-targets to confront in a given situation, but more research
needs to be conducted in this important area. The current set of studies as well as future studies have the potential to inform diversity training programs, in which organizations train both targets and non-targets how to personally deal with and confront individuals who make biased remarks (see Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008).
References


Responses to Racist Comments


Rattan, A., & Dweck, C. S. (2010). Who confronts prejudice?: The role of implicit theories in the


Table 1. Verbal confrontation in Studies 1 and 2 as predicted by self-reported offensiveness of the comment, affective response, and prejudice level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Offensiveness</th>
<th>Affective reaction</th>
<th>Prejudice (ATB)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1 Verbal Confrontation</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>-.45***</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2 Verbal Confrontation</td>
<td>.62***</td>
<td>-.68***</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Verbal confrontation in Study 1 was operationalized as coders’ ratings of verbal disagreement from participants’ free response descriptions of their behavior following the racist comment. In Study 2, participants self-reported verbal confrontation by indicating how strongly they expressed verbal disagreement after the comment was said. The affective reaction variable was organized such that more positively valenced scores indicate more positive affective reactions. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Verbal confronting behavior in Study 2 as a function of offensiveness and gender.

Figure 2. Verbal confronting behavior in Study 2 as a function of affective response and gender.