

Objectivity Interrogation of Racial Scholarship in Psychology and Management

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Abstract

Scholars of color remain underrepresented in US institutions in academia. In this paper, the researchers will examine one factor that contributes to their continued marginalization in psychology and management: the scientific method's commitment to traditional notions of objectivity. Torrez, Dupree, and Kraus argue that objectivity—defined as practices and policies rooted in the heightened value placed on a research process that is ostensibly free from bias—is central to the prominence of primarily White scholarship in psychology and management research and remains central to knowledge production. To investigate this, they employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data, to codify how scholars of color experience objectivity interrogations, or written and verbal questioning in academic contexts that implicate their scientific rigor. They also identify how scholars of color engage in objectivity armoring, or self-presentational strategies (toning down and stepping up), employed by these scholars to contend with these interrogations. Finally, the researchers reveal these toning down processes in language use within publications on racial scholarship. Overall, these studies reveal the unique challenges scholars of color face to legitimize and validate their work on race and racism within predominantly White institutions and disciplines.

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Objectivity Interrogation of Racial Scholarship in Psychology and Management

“Epistemological choices about whom to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail.” – Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Epistemology*

In US social science research across time, scholars of color have consistently found themselves forced to the margins (Armstrong, 1979; Delgado, 1984; King et al., 2017), and recent analyses indicate that these conditions continue (Roberts et al., 2020). In separate scoping reviews of the literature in psychology and management over four decades, scholarship in psychology is largely dominated by White scholars (Cascio & Aguinis 2008; Roberts et al. 2020). Querying more than 11,500 empirical articles published in two of social psychology’s higher-ranked journals (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin*), Roberts and colleagues (2020) found that the vast majority were edited by White editors (92%), written by White scholars (72%), and tended to neglect to report the demographic characteristics of the samples. These conditions highlight a status quo where social science knowledge is generated by, for, and about White people.

In this study, our goal is to better understand this process of racial marginalization in US psychology and management racial scholarship—which we define as social science research that is conducted by, for, and about people of color. We accomplish this through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology that attempts to a) understand researcher experiences of producing racial scholarship in their own words, and b) assess the end products of that racial scholarship in the form of published academic journal writing. First, we acknowledge the history of US research in psychology and management and theorize the process through which scholars of color, who conduct racial scholarship, may be more likely to incur challenges to their scholarship—challenges that may shape professional self-presentation. Second, we review findings from a qualitative interview study in which we identify the kinds of challenges to racial scholarship as well

as the self-presentational strategies scholars employ to contend with these challenges. Third, we present results from an archival study wherein we analyze differences in word use employed by scholars of color versus White scholars in published scientific abstracts on racial scholarship to further investigate the consequences of these self-presentational strategies for the scientific record.

There are many structural factors that force scholars of color to the academic margins; these have been covered elsewhere (e.g., Dupree & Boykin, 2021; Ray, 2019). Our investigation led us to one specific, salient challenge to scholars of color conducting racial scholarship in the US that relates to social scientific commitments to objectivity in the context of research epistemology. Specifically, academic knowledge production in psychology and management research is judged by objectivity norms—whether the research is methodologically rigorous, neutral, and detached from personal interests (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Here, we argue that racial scholarship produced by scholars of color, in particular—which tends to center the unique perspectives of the racially marginalized and challenge the (predominantly White) status quo—is perceived as running counter to these objectivity norms. In mainstream academic spaces, racial scholarship conducted by scholars of color, therefore, risks perception as less credible, less legitimate, and more biased than scholarship that does not center marginalized perspectives and experiences.

Objectivity Norms in the Production and Validation of Racial Scholarship

Objectivity, defined as the “extent to which a researcher’s methods are free from prejudice”, is typically upheld across many areas of social sciences as a norm indicating scientific rigor, personal detachment, and neutrality (Armstrong, 1979, p. 423; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). These norms of objectivity are distinctly positivist. Positivism is a philosophical theory asserting that all truth is verifiable, and that scientific evidence exactly reflects the reality of the world—completely free of values (Passmore, 1967; Zammito, 2004). Thus, a social scientific positivist perspective values

approaching research from a detached perspective that is free from prejudgment; indeed, some social science research manuals highlight the importance of objectivity (e.g., Salter & Adams, 2013).

As social scientists, we value skepticism about our own and others' research. However, no pure social science is colorblind or otherwise abstracted from context (Nagel, 1986). Nevertheless, many social scientific fields, in the US and elsewhere, subscribe to forms of positivist epistemology (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Positivist epistemology, because it is similar to philosophies of science in the natural sciences, has historically enhanced the legitimacy of social sciences through shared methods and practices (Hedges, 1987; Lieberman, 1985; Oppenheim, 1948; Rosenthal, 1990). Thus, scholarship in management and psychology has tended toward a focus on objectivity and positivism (Hassard, 1995; Salter & Adams, 2013).

Racial scholarship (and indeed, any scholarship that derives from marginalized identities) is inconsistent with positivist epistemology for several reasons (Dupree & Kraus, 2022; Roberts & Mortensen, 2022). First, as stated above, there is no pure form of social science that can be fully colorblind or wholly extracted from its context (Salter & Adams, 2013). Research across the social sciences illustrates how people's racioethnic identities—and the contexts those identities are embedded in—shape perceptions and judgments about society (Dupree et al., 2022; Kraus et al., 2019; Mueller, 2020). Social scientists are subject to these same perceptual processes and errors.

Second, racial scholarship often rejects principles of neutrality. Norms of detachment and objectivity have a history in US social science research that is echoed in the words of sociologist Robert Park: “The world was full of crusaders. [One's] role instead was to be that of the calm, detached scientist who investigates race relations with the same objectivity and detachment with which the zoologist dissects the potato bug” (Morris & Ghaziani, 2005, p. 52). Personal attachment to one's work—for example, the idea that your research could inform changes to alleviate oppression—introduces the researcher's stake in the research process and thus runs counter to

objectivity norms. Despite such norms, many scholars of color have been, and continue to be, interested in social sciences as a means through which they can illuminate (and clarify) the unique experiences and insights offered by people of color (Collins, 2022). The explicit centering of marginalized groups' experiences—and the vested interest in producing social science by and about these groups—departs from and challenges prevailing objectivity norms.

Finally, racial scholarship in the social sciences is often informed by alternative epistemologies. For example, Black feminist epistemology asserts that as each group of oppressed peoples furthers the ideas offered by their unique standpoint this builds toward greater truth and knowledge (Collins, 2022). Black feminist thought challenges traditional notions of what objective truths are, as well as how one arrives at them (Collins, 2022). Importantly, Black feminist epistemology highlights how some high-status identities (e.g., White, male, middle-class) are centered in organizations and in US social science research, and thereby emphasizes the need for alternative, marginalized perspectives (e.g., Ray, 2019; Rivera, 2017).

The widespread embrace of positivism has left the social sciences, at best, ignorant of (and at worst, dismissive of) the notion that scholars' identities, values, and context influence truth—a central assertion of racial scholarship. As scholars of color produce racial scholarship in psychology and management, their research is invariably informed by their unique racioethnic identities and alternative epistemological perspectives. This suggests that scholars of color producing racial scholarship are likely to contend with *objectivity interrogations* that arise from positivist norms.

Objectivity Armoring and Self-Presentational Techniques

Social scientists are likely to encounter objectivity norms at all phases of the research process, from idea generation to promotion and tenure review. To achieve traditional forms of legitimacy (e.g., faculty positions and publications) along with their material benefits, US social scientists must adopt strategies for demonstrating objectivity. While all scholars face questions about

research rigor, methodological expertise, and quality assurance checks, scholars of color conducting racial scholarship are particularly likely to face objectivity interrogations for the reasons articulated above. We therefore expect scholars of color conducting racial scholarship to engage in self-presentational strategies, which we refer to as *objectivity armoring*, to manage these norms.

To avoid objectivity interrogation, scholars of color may subdue authentic expression of their racial scholarship—for example, downplaying their connections to communities impacted by equity-enhancing policies. Such expression could implicate one's objectivity by suggesting that their scholarship is driven by personal investment. Much like how racial minorities downplay their stigmatized racial identities in the workplace (Dupree, 2021; Goffman, 2009; Kang et al. 2016), scholars of color studying race may disassociate themselves from objectivity interrogations by attempting to present their research in ways that lends itself to perceptions of enhanced objectivity.

This self-presentational approach can take many forms. For example, concerns about appearing to lack objectivity can lead a scholar studying racism to reframe the conclusions of their research using more palatable euphemisms and positive language that, for instance, reduce blame for dominant groups (e.g., *racial disparities* rather than *racism*; Glasser, 1992). Given conventional standards of rigor in psychology and management as rooted in quantification, scholars of color may also attempt to increase the perceived quality of their work via additional statistical training, quantification, or preparation. Finally, concerned that objectivity norms will incur significant skepticism, scholars of color may meticulously prepare and rehearse every phrase of a research presentation.

While these self-presentational strategies may be partially effective in mitigating concerns about objectivity, prior research indicates that they are cognitively and emotionally depleting (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005). For scholars of color conducting this racial scholarship, the additional scrutiny and effort needed in quantification and self-presentation can result in these scholars

delaying their own research progress, despite known scarcity of academic appointments. Moreover, such strategies ultimately contribute to shaping racial discourse that downplays the severity, persistence, and structure of racism in society (Andersen, 2003). This flies in the face of longstanding and recent calls to decolonize psychological science (American Psychological Association, 2021; Shelton, 2000). Moreover, it hinders the production of innovative, authentic, and radical scholarship that can help solve one of the foremost social problems of our time: racial inequality.

Scholar Interviews

To examine objectivity interrogation and armoring, we employed a multi-method approach that integrated qualitative and quantitative methods, including in-depth interviews and archival analyses. We first examine the production of racial scholarship—and the role of objectivity in that process—through interviews with psychological and management scholars studying racial issues. Although a quantitative investigation of this phenomenon is possible (and has been studied in other domains; Torrez et al., 2024), such designs do not allow for an in-depth understanding through firsthand accounts of scholars of colors' lived experiences (Torrez et al., 2023; Roberts et al., 2020). Qualitative interviews allow us to directly attend to these experiences.

These interviews allowed an in-depth investigation of objectivity. We gathered a rich set of narratives around experiences communicating racial scholarship in academia from scholars varying in race, gender, and tenure in the field. Social science research is normatively subject to public scrutiny during research presentations. Presentations also allow participants to engage in a wide variety of self-presentational techniques and are an important site of evaluation in academia (Saffie-Robertson & Fiset, 2020). Thus, conversations focused on scholars' experiences communicating racial scholarship during presentations: in lab meetings, with individual faculty or peers, or at large conferences. Such interviews can help us understand the role of objectivity in evaluative contexts

shared by social science scholars across disciplines in the US. Importantly, we recruited scholars from multiple racioethnic groups, as we expected this phenomenon may depend on scholar race¹.

Data Collection

The first author conducted 51 in-depth interviews with 31 scholars of color and 20 White scholars studying racial issues from September 2019 to May 2020, totaling approximately 36 exposure hours. Given the first author's ethnic identity (Latina) and field of study (psychology and management) she was able to make use of personal networks in psychology (e.g., the Society of Personality and Social Psychology) and management (e.g., The PhD Project) to recruit potential participants. Scholars identified as studying racial issues were contacted via email and asked to complete a short intake survey, which included the consent form, demographic questions, participants' CVs. (CVs were requested to review scholars' research ahead of each interview). Once participants completed the survey, they were contacted via email to schedule an interview time.

Approximately two-thirds were scholars in psychology and another third were scholars in management, which draws from psychology and related disciplines. Regarding career stage, 59% of participants were graduate students; other scholars' positions represented a range of tenure in the field (e.g., post-doctoral scholars, untenured and tenured faculty). Approximately 69% percent of scholars identified as female; the rest identified as either male or non-binary. To protect the scholars' identities, we will not provide their exact racioethnic breakdown. Instead, we refer to scholars as either a scholar of color (RM) or a White scholar (WH). This categorization structure also matches the themes that emerged from our scholar interviews.

Each interview began with a discussion of confidentiality, recording permissions, and a general discussion of the project background and interview goals. All scholars consented to

¹ We do not conceive of White scholars as a default group (Syed, 2020) from which to compare the experiences of racioethnic minority scholars. Instead, White scholars are another racioethnic group from which we can gather more information about the boundaries of this phenomenon.

participate in the study, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Yale University. Interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide broken down into three sections: 1) research interests, 2) experiences presenting research, and 3) how scholars' racial identity shapes their experiences conducting and presenting racial scholarship. Interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and took place over the phone. Notes and memos were taken throughout the interviews, and the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, with identifiable information removed.

In the interviews, participants were initially told that we were interested in how researchers make sense of their research interests and their experiences sharing their work formally or informally. To gain a general sense of how participants framed their work, we first asked scholars to describe their research and its development. The interviewer then segued to a set of questions on presenting research, asking scholars how people in their field think about their research interests. Participants were then asked to describe a time when they presented their work. If necessary, the interviewer chose CV items to initiate conversation, picking one presentation on racial scholarship and one that did not reference race. After a general description of their experiences, the interviewer asked participants if they had ever encountered skepticism in response to their work, and, if so, to discuss it. Finally, we asked participants how they felt their racioethnic identity influenced their presentation experiences². Data collection continued until saturation was reached regarding participants' experiences of objectivity interrogation and self-presentation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data Analysis

We used a form of content analysis for this study, drawing on analytic techniques derived from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this form of analysis, the theory is generated directly from the data itself (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This bottom-up process is an

² This area of inquiry was not discussed in early interviews. However, after interviewing a handful of participants, it became clear this was a consistently emerging theme in participants' discussions about presenting their work and responses to their work and we therefore amended the interview guide to include these questions.

inductive method, which allows the researchers to systematically comb through participants' rich, detailed experiences. Themes emerge from these data, resulting in a nuanced but organized theory of objectivity interrogation and objectivity armoring that is derived directly from participants' disclosed experiences in the field.

Following data collection, NVIVO qualitative data analysis software was used to document, track, organize, and summarize codes and themes. The first author then embarked upon a three-phase coding approach (Dey, 1993). The first phase was open coding. The first author a) identified segments of text that refer to specific concepts, and b) allocated a certain code to that concept. This resulted in an extensive list of codes with which to label the data. The second phase followed the first two of Dey's (1993) three aspects of qualitative data analysis: describing, classifying, and connecting. Initial reading of each text segment ensured comprehension (describing), followed by allocation of an initial code (classifying). All transcripts were coded, line-by-line, following this process.

The second phase followed the last of Dey's (1993) three aspects of qualitative data analysis: connecting. Drawing on the full list of initial open codes developed in phase one, the first author examined the relationships between codes, sorting first-order codes representing similar ideas into second-order categories. In the final phase, we assessed categories for conceptual overlap and explored patterns that emerged. We then refined and connected the second-order categories, organizing them into main themes that could be interpreted (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Two theoretical dimensions emerged: (1) objectivity interrogations directed toward scholars; and (2) scholars' self-presentational techniques employed in response to these interrogations³.

Objectivity Interrogations of Scholars of Color

³ Throughout coding, we took care to examine the data for negative cases, paying particular attention to White scholars' interrogative experiences and self-presentational techniques. We also interviewed scholars of color who do not study race. These cases will also be discussed and serve to enhance our understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

A summary of our coding scheme, as well as additional representative quotations, appears in Table 1. A majority of scholars of color (87%) shared at least one experience of objectivity interrogation. In this section, we will present our findings regarding the types of interrogations scholars encountered. Responses fell into two conceptual categories: disbelief and pushback.

Table 1. Thematic Coding Analysis of Objectivity Interrogations and Armoring		
Themes	Codes	Representative Quotes*
Objectivity Interrogations		
Disbelief	Disbelief	“I’ll say a fact and...the response is, ‘I just find that hard to believe.’ I’m like, ‘Okay, well ... I’m telling you a fact.’”
Pushback	Ideological Pushback	“White, tenured faculty would come out and say things like, ‘Oh yeah, all those people studying their own issues,’ when they were talking about people studying diversity.”
	Methodological Pushback	“One of my other lab mates, she would present qualitative work and they would come at her very critical, in a very non-constructive manner, which didn’t make sense because none of them did qualitative work. ... I’m like, ‘No, that’s not how qualitative methodology works.’”
Objectivity Armoring		
Toning Down	Constraint	“Some of my more radical beliefs... they’re supported by what I’m saying, but I don’t lay it out that thickly.”
	Avoidance	“I actually really think [switching topics] helps. So sometimes I’m talking about a category that’s not threatening to the people in the room, and sometimes I’m talking about a category that is threatening.”
Stepping Up	Overpreparation	“It helps me think ahead of time, what are the questions that I’m going to get? How can I frame this in a way that very clearly communicates the scope of my idea and the boundaries of my idea?”
	Quantification	“Folks tend to undermine the methods that people of color use or assume that they don’t know how to do

certain things. I take extra care to learn those things and make sure that it's extra clean, and make sure I always check for small areas and stuff like that. Because, I'd feel we're more likely to get critiqued on the little things.”

Exacting
Communication

“It's usually me spending hours ... just going through the slides and getting down the wording exactly as I want it, and the intonations and inflections and my hand movements and like the dramatic pauses and all of that. So I practice that like a play. And so that's what prepares me.”

*All quotations are from racial minority scholars.

Disbelief

Disbelief fundamentally called into question a researcher’s judgment by directly questioning whether a racialized phenomenon was true or real, casting doubt on the researcher’s ability and judgment. This kind of interrogation is in line with our assertion that research that challenges normative standards (e.g., research revealing the racialized nature of society) may prompt doubt in researcher judgment, eliciting a more skeptical review process. The denial of racism is a common response employed by people who, intentionally or otherwise, want to think of society as meritocratic or egalitarian (Kraus et al., 2019; Mueller, 2020, Ray, 2019). Indeed, this reaction to the experiences of marginalized groups has costs for scholars of color studying racial scholarship. Disbelief introduces systematic doubt in a program of research (and the researcher’s judgment and ability) as soon as the researcher’s identity and topic are known.

Disbelief in basic, easily-corroborated claims by scholars of color conducting racial scholarship is difficult to reconcile with academic norms of knowledge production. For instance, bias, even explicit bias, persists today (Axt, 2017; Quillian & Lee, 2023), and yet, one scholar of color shared how their work on bias was interrogated for its veracity: “One of the kind of strongest themes of my early talk was probably the question of, ‘Do people even say biased things?’ and, ‘Is

that comment in your study even biased?” (RM_4). This scholar described senior graduate students asking them, “Why does this matter?”. In response they internalized, “I have no idea. Everything I think is terrible.” Disbelief was raised about a basic experience that scholars of color face—one that has decades of evidence in the social sciences (Pager & Shepard, 2008). The scholar’s response was to internally question their own judgment and capacity to conduct research.

Another interviewee recalled a moment at a scholarship panel on stereotyping and discrimination when someone interrupted to say that they did not believe stereotyping was “real”:

“There’s only been very few moments in my life where even as a person, not as much as a scholar, where I feel like my personhood was questioned that explicitly to my face. I think such a large part of being a person of color and ethnic minority, or gender minority means that you have experienced stereotyping, discrimination, and bias all the time in a thousand different ways. To have someone say that’s not real, was just to basically say like, ‘Oh, your lived experience is just not real, you’re making it all up’, which people hear all the time when they get gaslit.” (RM_13)

Here the scholar highlights the connection between their “personhood” and their racial scholarship. Scholars of color conduct racial scholarship that is often novel to social sciences because it comes from marginalized lived experiences. Disbelief cast at these experiences and the resultant research is an explicit and public questioning of a marginalized scholar’s judgment. The structure of psychology and management means that scholars of color have their racial scholarship evaluated by White audiences—audiences who do not have personal experiences of racial bias and discrimination.

Disbelief is thus a feature of evaluation beyond research presentations and into the review process:

“You have to get the reviewers to understand your paper, of course, and buy the ideas. But it’s really hard when they don’t have that perspective. There’s no way they’ll ever fully understand it, so it’s how do you convince people of a reality that they’ve never lived? But that’s part of the job and the research... convince people that this is really important when they’ve never encountered it—and never will.” (RM_16)

Although these examples vary in the directness of their denial of established racialized phenomena (e.g., bias and stereotyping), questions of a scholar of color’s judgment were sometimes

made explicitly. For instance, some scholars reported being informed during presentations that their research was a poor fit for their discipline:

“I got to the Q&A, and there were numerous questions, doubting the theory and whatever. Very, very little support. I don’t recall anybody being like, this is a really great idea and I’m excited you’re pursuing it. It was all very sort of negative and here are the problems ... It got to a point where one of the faculty members outright said, ‘I really just feel like this is not social psychology.’” (RM_23)

As highlighted above, while interrogations can emerge as explicitly negative commentary, they can also emerge as a lack of positive commentary, relative to departmental norms. This narrative also underscores how disbelief can convert to explicitly-stated concerns about a marginalized scholar’s judgment and even their fit in the field. On the most extreme end, disbelief can also be based in ideologies of White superiority:

“I had done a project on the disproportionate rate of Black males in special education programs ... and this White woman came up to me and the first thing she said to me was, ‘You don’t think that there’s more Black men in special education because they’re just not as smart?’” (RM_26)

Pushback

Interrogations—defined here as pushback—reinforce the theorized skeptical review process. The vast majority of scholars of color recalled an experience of pushback when sharing their research. Here, we categorize pushback into two first-order categories: (1) *ideological pushback*, implicating the scholars’ positionality in relation to an ideological agenda, and (2) *methodological pushback*, implicating the scholars’ methodological and analytical choices.

Ideological Pushback. Although both types of pushback were frequent in interviewees’ responses, ideological pushback was more common, with more than three quarters of scholars of color reporting an experience of ideological pushback. As with disbelief, these experiences ranged from more explicit (e.g., angry statements directed at scholars) to more subtle (e.g., suggesting that the research has a political agenda). One faculty member shared more explicit examples, in which they were asked to mind how their racial identity influences their research:

“I have had people ask me, ‘Well, you're doing this research because you as an [racial minority identity redacted] are of course curious about this.’ And then the second line following that is typically, ‘But you want to make sure you don't inject your own prejudices into your research.’ Which then I say, ‘Yes, I understand that but we have to do research that fascinates us.’... I guess the underlying motivation for what people are trying to tell me is always keep your biases in check.” (RM_102)

Although the research topic was novel and innovative, it was reduced to “me-search”. The scholar’s racial identity calls into question their ability to “keep [their] biases in check” (RM_102). This narrative highlights the implications of interrogation for the perceived rigor of the work. Other scholars of color noted that their work on diversity is often perceived as “lower in quality or political and agenda-driven” (RM_12) and that “if I'm studying [racial minorities] and I am a [racial minority], then I automatically have an agenda” (RM_14). Others noted that their work is not perceived as “legitimate” (RM_19) and is seen as “more of an opinion than scientific” (RM_8). One scholar noted that the stigma against theorizing from lived experiences was unique to racial scholarship:

“When people bring in their personal selves or stories about how they got to the research question that's not around race or inequality, it's seen as kind of, ‘Wow you are really observant of your surroundings and you have a great way to observe different social phenomenon in the real world,’ but as a person of color having experiences it's kind of like, ‘Of course you're going to think that.’” (RM_11)

On the more extreme end, a scholar described how, in response to their work on affirmative action, a White faculty member “flipped out” and felt “triggered” (RM_20). Importantly, the downstream consequences of such pushback can be severe, with one tenured faculty member noting how ideological pushback to their work will be permanently fixed in their tenure and promotion file:

“At the time [of my review], it was represented that at least one person ... questioned whether my research could ever be viewed as truly world-class science because of the ‘ideologies behind them’... My review committee refused to take it out, and so it's ended up in my third-year review. It's still there. ... The quality of my work has been questioned by people who see it as driven from ideology, that when questioned about what ideology they think I'm pushing, they will never say.” (RM_104)

We note how far-reaching this ideological pushback is. Although we expected pushback to be less likely for more senior scholars, we did not observe such patterns. Students and

faculty alike shared experiences where their scholarship was minimized, discounted, or discredited due to perceived ideologies—even if these ideologies could not be named.

Methodological Pushback. Over half of interviewees of color shared experiences with methodological pushback. Such interrogation primarily discredited or devalued one’s methodological choices. Scholars studying racial minorities were often critiqued for lacking a White control group—implying that one can only understand racial minority experiences via comparison with White experiences (Syed & Kathawalla, 2022). One scholar recalled, “We had this norm that you need a White control condition like you need to compare... That is the norm. And it was frustrating because it's like, ‘Do we need that to just talk about minority experiences?’” (RM_16). Scholars were asked by reviewers to explain how they can “generalize”, even though “When we have majority White samples, no one asks that question, it is just seen as a standard.” (RM_19)

However, any methodological choice could be called into question—including research design, method of data collection, and/or analytical techniques. One scholar described how their recruitment method was interrogated by a reviewer:

“Someone was like, ‘Oh snowball sampling is never a good methodology.’ And I was like, ‘Actually it's a good methodology if you want to get a certain demographic group that is hard to access ... that's the whole point of snowball sampling.’ And they were like, ‘Well yeah, it's only good if you want to get a very, very, very specific sample.’ Like an ethnic group is not specific enough.” (RM_13)

Snowball sampling is one of the most empirically-effective strategies to recruit minoritized populations (Hughes et al., 1995). However, this methodology was called into question in the context of racial scholarship. Other aspects of the research design that may be called into question are the racial identities of the research assistants (RAs) conducting the studies:

“[I was] walking through my methodology ... The first question I got was about my RAs and the race of the RAs and how did the race of the RAs impact whatever? And I thought that was the most basic question; we obviously accounted for that.” (RM_9)

Upon comparing the question-and-answer portion of their own and their classmates' first-year PhD talks, this scholar noted that the questions they received were decidedly "lower-tier"; the questions were not as carefully thought out, and by implication, did not constructively push the research forward. Finally, a scholar's statistical reporting techniques may also be interrogated to reject ordinary claims about racism (e.g., that White people may be racist):

"He's just like, 'You know, your effects are really, really small. That's only some White people. You really need to show on your figures that this is a small percentage of White people who act this way.'" (RM_7)

Overall, scholars of color conducting racial scholarship were often subject to a variety of interrogations that called into question their objectivity and credibility as scholars. Sometimes these were more subtle (e.g., challenging research findings based on effect sizes), and other times they were more explicit (e.g., implying that the predominance of Black men in special education is due to their inherent lack of intelligence).

Objectivity Interrogation Among White Scholars and on non-Racial Scholarship

The above data provide evidence of objectivity interrogations levied against scholars of color studying racial issues. However, we wondered whether this phenomenon was a feature of psychology and management presentations more broadly or if it was wielded disproportionately at racial scholarship (or even more specifically, at racial scholarship conducted by scholars of color). We first include data from scholars of color who, in addition to working on research projects centrally focused on race, also work on research where race is not centered. This allowed us to garner within-person evidence of objectivity interrogation experiences.

Scholars of color reported greater pushback when presenting scholarship centering race than when presenting work where race is not central. For example, a male tenured professor described the relative difficulty of talking about race versus gender—a non-marginalized identity for them—in

the classroom, saying, “People trust that what I’m saying about gender is more honest because it goes against my self-interest ... When I’m talking about race, I think there’s this, ‘Well, what’s in it for him?’ There’s that kind of feel to it.” (RM_20). As theorized, the perceived lack of objectivity makes it harder for scholars of color to present scholarship on race. This scholar further described the frustration that comes from knowing that racial scholarship could be more effectively delivered by their White colleagues; unfortunately, these colleagues did not want to deliver such content.

“[White colleagues] can really go a long way towards carrying the message ... yet they’re the ones that don’t want to engage. They don’t want to talk about implicit attitudes. They don’t want to talk about racism. They’re just uncomfortable. And I’m just like, ‘I don’t understand. I have to teach like the psychology of motivation. I don’t study that, but I learned it and I talk about it. Why can’t you all just learn this as a research topic and teach it?’” (RM_20)

A common thread that scholars of color noted was that the anxiety that pervades presentations on racial scholarship is lessened during non-race-related presentations.

Another scholar described the anxiety induced by presenting racial scholarship, in particular, even foregoing a job talk in order to avoid presenting on this topic:

“It was really the topic of talking about racism in front of academics, that was nerve wracking to me. To the point I remember I almost felt sick when I was about to give the talk. And that’s one of the reasons why I only got two job talk offers ... I turned down the other [job talk], because I had a hesitancy to go around and talk about this topic in the job market.” (RM_19)

Other scholars shared this sentiment, finding it easier to conduct research that was not explicitly about race. For instance, one scholar described such research as “a lot less nerve wracking. It’s super easy. I mean from start to finish... It doesn’t mean anything if it doesn’t work. Whereas this whole [race-related paper], I feel like I have something to prove when it doesn’t work.” (RM_4). Finally, another scholar reported feeling less like they needed to “perform” during non-race related talks:

“Those presentations are usually lighter. I can tell more jokes, and it’s more back and forth with the audience ... They don’t have a sense of heaviness. I’m able to perform the talk in a more lighthearted way, and therefore, I don’t necessarily feel drained. I just feel like, ‘Okay, that was cool.’” (RM_12)

White scholars, regardless of what they studied, were much less likely to report experiencing interrogations to their work on racial scholarship. As one scholar described: “I’ve been really lucky, because, in academic settings ... I don’t think I’ve ever encountered anyone who pushed back in kind of a really personally negative way against the research or felt like they were being attacked in any sense.” (WH_20). Other White scholars similarly described feeling “lucky” that they did not receive harsh criticism of their racial scholarship: “No one’s ever tried to overtly challenge me in any way about the stuff I’m concluding” (WH_11).

When probed about potential racial differences presenting racial scholarship, White scholars often described their Whiteness as protective; their identity deterred harsh criticism and allowed them to present with less pushback. As one White scholar pondered, “Being a White male I’m able to use language that might be read as accusatory ... language around privilege and anti-racism. And [this language], people have said this to me, can be read as ‘accusatory’ and make people uncomfortable.” (WH_15). This scholar also noted a difference in risk for White scholars versus scholars of color when presenting racial scholarship:

“[The work] might have serious implications [for scholars of color] in terms of, ‘I’m going to be harassed,’ or ‘I’m going to receive really nasty emails,’ or ‘Someone’s going to tell me that I don’t belong in this space,’ or ‘I might not get a job offer.’ ... By virtue of being a White man ... it just makes it easier for me.” (WH_15)

White scholars expressed that they felt they were seen as “more objective” (WH_4), given more “credibility” (WH_4), and seen as less invested, making them “much less threatening because it doesn’t look like I have skin in the game” (WH_18), due to their Whiteness.

In summary, these scholar interviews suggest frequent and widespread disbelief and pushback around racial scholarship specifically directed at scholars of color. Moreover, this

objectivity interrogation was less common and less intense for scholars of color studying topics not explicitly racialized and observed to be less frequent and intense by White scholars studying racial scholarship. We next detail self-presentational strategies that scholars of color engage in to manage objectivity interrogation.

Self-Presentational Techniques: Objectivity Armoring

Here, we review the self-presentational techniques described by scholars of color conducting racial scholarship to enhance perceptions of objectivity (i.e., objectivity armoring). Objectivity armoring occurred among a majority of the scholars of color we interviewed (74%) and fell into two conceptual categories, which we describe as *toning down* and *stepping up*.

Toning Down

One common self-presentational technique was toning down: softening findings, employing euphemisms, and avoiding certain claims to align with academic audiences. We categorize toning down into two first-order categories: (1) *constraint* and (2) *avoiding*.

Constraint. Scholars of color often reported softening their communication to avoid potential threat or discomfort. We use the word constraint to implicate the power dynamics involved in this process. These scholars of color felt they had to limit or restrict their preferred way of communicating their research (typically, to be heard by White evaluators). This constraint involved a variety of techniques, which we delineate below.

“I’ve figured out ways to talk about race in ways that are sort of generic sounding enough to get people to buy in. And then I start talking about what I’m talking about. So I found that talking more generally about group-based hierarchies abstractly is a way of getting people to accept that this stuff matters. ... [it’s] a way of gently leading people in.” (RM_20)

Scholars often found replacements for words that may be seen as threatening: “So instead of saying ‘modern racism’ all the time, you can switch it to say ‘bias’ sometimes, or ‘prejudice’ sometimes. Because if you are constantly repeating ‘racism, racism’, that can make people

uneasy.” (RM_19). Several scholars of color described adjusting their nonverbal behavior (e.g., smiling) to soften the delivery of racial scholarship: “In these spaces we always have to wear a mask, right? So you know, you do that sort of like bemused professional smile.” (RM_7).

Scholars of color described constraint as a self-presentational strategy to disarm potentially-threatened audiences, achieve professional status (e.g., employment), and appease White audiences: “I think there are probably some more radical takes that I could put on that would get you in more trouble in the field, which I don't do, because I don't have a job yet” (RM_10), and “But those aren't things you can just say during an interview. You don't want that to limit your options.” (RM_27). Most commonly, scholars were explicitly taught these strategies by their advisors or mentors, often in service of gaining employment.

“People were like, ‘you're making everyone in your audience feel like you're calling them a racist ... You can't navigate that well enough to avoid making them feel like they're biased .., and you've got to get a job.’” (RM_104)

Scholars received feedback from mentors to “water down your work and say that it applies to everybody... or say it's going to be about diversity” (RM_15). This was often framed as protective: “They're attempting to look out for me and say like, ‘Look, like we want you to produce high quality work, and do well, and get a job, and so on.’” (RM_2). This advice was explicitly given to assuage the discomforts of a White audience:

“The biggest trope I get is ‘Don't scare these White people. Don't scare these White people. You got to talk them out of this thing. You got to talk about it this way. You can't say that. You can't say this.’ And I'm like, ‘No, but what I'm saying is the truth.’ They're like, ‘Yeah, but you have to make sure they hear you.’” (RM_7)

Constraint was described as key to being seen as professional, even when that meant subduing the truth: “When like minoritized scholars hedge ... the idea is that you're a better scientist. ... The moment that you say more out there things, you are now like more of an

activist. ... It's just deemed to be 'more professional'" (RM_12). For scholars of color, "professional" meant being a calm, detached, and objective scientist.

As with objectivity interrogations, constraint was often employed for the benefit of White scholars and was explicitly informed by scholars' racial identities:

"I also have to handhold people through some things that are relatively uncomfortable and do so in a way that is friendly. To be threatening in a friendly way, I think that is informed by the fact that I show up as a [racial identity redacted] to these rooms." (RM_18)

This meant that scholars often mentioned practicing self-interrogation, to remind themselves to remain silent rather than upset White colleagues: "If I thought something was ignorant I had to be like, do I say something or do I keep quiet?... If I get upset by something it's like, 'oh there goes the spicy feisty [racial identity redacted]'" (RM_5), and "It makes me probably more hesitant if anything for what I do...and I think I'm processing the identity politics of it in a personal way of like, 'Oh, is that going to bother someone if I say that?'" (RM_24).

Avoidance. Although scholars of color often tried self-presentational constraint to appear more objective, they sometimes felt the only option was to abandon racial scholarship projects altogether, often in favor of research that will be more interesting to White advisors and audiences.

"I want to be known as a [race] scholar. ... But one thing that I've struggled with is I've thought about almost all of this by myself. Whereas with all this other stuff that I'm doing I have several people who are willing to talk through my findings and really try to figure out what's going on. Whereas for my [race] stuff, it really has felt, it's just me out here on a whim not knowing what the fuck I'm doing. And so I, after that experience, I definitely think I shifted to non-[race] stuff." (RM_4)

As with the example above, avoidance was often imposed by colleagues and advisors who were unwilling or unable to engage with race-related research topics: "I just was like, 'If I stick with social class, then he'll feel like it's something he can relate to. ... That's safe for both of us.' And so I just kind of stayed in my lane and did that." (RM_21). Because of this, scholars of color felt constrained

in the topics they were able to study. This meant, for some, they ended up studying topics that were not of particular interest to them.

“I just ended up doing what he was doing and kind of like dropped my interests. ... He was doing work on confrontation and it was basically looking at how Black folks can ease tensions within interracial interactions... Early on, I did want to do a lot of interracial work and Black folks' perceptions of other Black folks. But ... like no one is going to care about this particular interest.” (RM_9)

Stepping Up

The first two self-presentational strategies (constraint and avoidance) involve scholars of color toning down their manner of speaking or approach to research. Another strategy involved scholars “stepping up” their communication techniques to avoid interrogation. Stepping up was comprised of three categories: 1) overpreparation, 2) quantification, and 3) exacting communication.

Overpreparation. Overpreparation involved scholars spending significant time preparing specific details for their presentations, anticipating interrogations and rehearsing responses, and accumulating evidence to avoid misunderstanding or appearing incompetent. This resulted in near constant adjustment: “I’ll go to visit people’s labs and present it, meet people at coffee shops, get on Skype with people and just take notes and keep adjusting and keep adjusting” (RM_18). This approach was described as cognitively depleting:

“You do a lot of legwork on the backend of knowing everything in and out. ... Which is a waste of mental things ... When you’re dealing with that sort of environment, you just want to be prepared on everything. I like tend to over prepare, which is good. I think people tend to think that I present well for that reason, but. I think it’s unnecessary at a certain point.” (RM_13)

Like toning down practices, this stepping up approach is often informed by scholars’ perceptions that their scholarly integrity and objectivity are in question due to their racial identity:

“Whether people view me as objective is implicated because of my identity. And, so, that’s also why I like to know my talk back and forth. I need to have thought about all the different questions that I could get and how I’m going to answer them.” (RM_17)

Another noted that scholars were aware that they can be perceived as biased, and this motivated overpreparation:

“By being a [racial identity redacted], I'm usually the only one in the room sometimes, when I'm presenting my work... Our anticipation of people believing that we're biased affects our presentations, so we want to make sure every fact, every decimal point is in the right place ... I have to do my due diligence in my work, because it's already, in my mind, being seen as coming through a biased lens.” (RM_14)

Overpreparation often involved monopolizing a large amount of talk time to “prove” certain points to a predominantly White academic audience:

The strongest themes of my early talks were probably the questions of, ‘Do people even say biased things?’ and, ‘Is that comment in your study even biased?’ So I would spend tons of time having to prove those two points. (RM_4)

In fact, scholars of color often described being interrupted to explain racialized topics that were quite germane yet not well understood by their audiences. For example, the above scholar lamented having to spend time having to explain the basic concept of intersectionality, “whereas a lot of my other peers were talking about all of the studies that they did” (RM_4).

Scholars of color also overprepared to eschew negative stereotypes based on these scholars’ racial identities and avoid potential interrogations. One scholar described this as codeswitching, saying “I'm always over-prepared with my work. I think I've been trained to do that, to try to avoid stereotypes, which is a form of code-switching” (RM_17). Another stressed the importance of establishing competence early, noting “In the literature review part, and I think that helps, when you flagrantly demonstrate competence, right? I think on the front end it might have deterred people from engaging in unhelpful competence questioning behaviors.” (RM_3).

These overpreparation efforts were not always successful in answering questions of objectivity. As one scholar presenting on stereotypes noted:

“There's literally books and books and journal articles and chapters and entire issues of work in this space...I was like just trying to explain to him how all of this works, how structural racism and inequality works, how it leads to stereotyping. And he just totally was not buying it. He's like, ‘I just don't think it's real.’” (RM_13)

Quantification. Scholars of color seem to understand that positivism is dominant in their discipline and employ quantitative methodologies to increase their perceived objectivity (and therefore, credibility). Such quantification included scholars amplifying their statistical techniques, analytic approaches, or studies to align with methodological standards of objectivity:

“More on the statistical end and really just trying to read up on, for example, a structural equation model ... thinking about all the little things, knowing that I can explain everything in my syntax and everything in my output ... I'm always doing that, and going through my scripts and making sure that they're all replicable and close to them and people can know what I did. Just taking those steps.” (RM_22)

This scholar specifically tied quantification to their racial identity, noting:

“[People of color] have to be careful about just the methods they use, and how they use them in terms of making sure you're using the most rigorous techniques available for whatever method it is... Making sure you're trying to live up to the best practices, whatever method that is.” (RM_22)

Scholars who used quantification strategies felt more confident in their work: “It's hard to argue with numbers. If I were to point something out that is uncomfortable, especially for the majority group, well, I don't know what to tell you guys, that's what the numbers told me.”

(RM_103). Moreso, one scholar mentioned that because they “have been developing rigorous methods to quantify these things” (RM_12), their work was received more positively. Although it required more time and effort to gain additional expertise, scholars of color perceived this as a protective measure to prevent criticism of their research:

“I'm going to do clean, strong work and they can't challenge that part. They can say ‘I disagree.’ They can say ‘I don't really like it,’ but they can't say ‘Your methods were flawed’ or ‘You didn't have a big enough sample,’ or ‘The analyses were suspect,’ or ‘You didn't preregister.’ None of that.” (RM_23)

Importantly, quantification often occurred with toning down. Additional quantification allowed scholars of color to be more measured when presenting findings, reporting that they “let the data speak for itself” (RM_7), and “try not to speak beyond my data” (RM_17).

Exacting Communication. Finally, scholars also employed exacting communication: a method of speaking in which they carefully and meticulously selected their verbiage for a presentation. This strict presentation strategy is closely related to the toning down practice of constraint; to avoid having their work misunderstood or rejected, scholars spent time selecting precise words or phrases to present their research. For example, one scholar mentioned they were “very careful about the claims that I was making about the research” (RM_25), while another said, “I don't want my words misconstrued or misinterpreted. I like to be very clear and exact with what I mean” (RM_11).

As with the previous self-presentational strategies, this technique surfaced when presenting to predominantly White audiences, largely to avoid their own and audience discomfort:

“[When] I am the only person of color in the room, you know, they can't help but make things feel a little uncomfortable, at least for me. Or make me think twice sometimes about exactly what I say, or how I phrase it.” (RM_8)

Another scholar mentioned that this was a strategy employed in order to avoid offending majority group members: “I have to be a lot more careful with my words to not offend majority group members that feel left out ... within presenting there's just more consciousness of my words when I'm talking about sensitive topics.” (RM_11).

Objectivity Armoring among White Scholars and on non-Racial Scholarship

We sought to better understand the boundaries of the self-presentational strategies employed by scholars of color conducting racial scholarship by examining White scholars and scholars of color conducting research on scholarship that was not explicitly racialized. In our interviews, we observed less exacting communication patterns employed by White scholars:

“I threw that presentation together the week that I was giving it. ... I wasn't exactly taking a big step back and thinking about the way that it would come across to everybody or the broad themes that I was emphasizing. It was more just like I was like, ‘Okay, I have a lot of cool data.’” (WH_11)

This contrasts with the intense overpreparation exhibited by scholars of color. Indeed, another White scholar reported that they “try not to overprepare” (WH_18).

We also provide negative cases, wherein White scholars do report objectivity interrogations or self-presentational shifts. In the rare cases when White scholars did report objectivity interrogations, they were not described as particularly concerning:

“There’s been negative reactions there, and you look at the source of it and it’s who you would expect. It’s the people who, in my mind, are causing some of the biggest problems in society and they should be threatened by this work identifying the source of their threat. . . . It doesn’t really bother me. If anything it encourages me, or strengthens my resolve.” (WH_12)

This reflection underscores the relative positions that White scholars and scholars of color hold; rather than discouraging this scholar, interrogations seemed to encourage them to keep going with their work. Another scholar reported that they “[weren’t] too affected” by interrogations, describing them as “weird question[s] . . . something that a lot of race researchers get and especially researchers of color” (WH_5). Another reported that an interrogation they received was not “specific necessarily to that talk” suggesting that “it might just be the audience at [conference]” (WH_9). When White scholars did report self-presentational shifts, they only did so to attend to specific methodological context:

“I’m mostly worried about, ‘Oh are people going to be okay with how I preprocessed this data?’ Or ‘Oh, is this computational approach actually legitimate?’ That’s why I really haven’t thought at all about, ‘Oh, how are people going to feel about my presenting intergroup work?’” (WH_3)

Generally, White scholars were much less likely to receive interrogations to their work. When they did, they were often less affected by it and less likely to shift their self-presentational strategies in response. One White scholar reflected on how their identity protected them from interrogations around racial scholarship: “Language around privilege and anti-racism...can be read as ‘accusatory’ and make people uncomfortable. And in my head I think I’m better able or it’s safer for me.” (WH_15). This prevents White scholars

from truly understanding the experiences of scholars of color conducting racial scholarship: “Because I’m at a distance, I think it’s hard for me to truly understand what that experience is like to listen to [interrogations] as a member of the target group.” (WH_9).

Our interviews with scholars of color conducting racial scholarship revealed that these scholars experienced disbelief and pushback around their research—interrogations that questioned basic facts and their ideological commitments, surfacing broader concerns about their own bias on racial scholarship. In response, these scholars toned down their language and presentation styles and stepped up their quantification and communication patterns. Scholars of color mentioned having fewer of these objectivity interrogation experiences in scholarship that was not explicitly racialized. Moreover, White scholars observed rarer instances of objectivity interrogation, and thus reported using fewer self-presentational strategies to contend with these interrogations.

Archival Analysis

Our interviews revealed techniques that scholars of color employ to influence perceptions of objectivity. These techniques were described by scholars of color in the context of research presentations. However, we reasoned that these presentation strategies could shape the publication process, with implications for how scholars represent their racial scholarship within journal publications. We explored this possibility in an archival analysis of published scientific abstracts.

Our archival analysis investigated two possible outcomes of objectivity interrogation that were related to the toning down strategies that scholars mentioned in interviews. The first relates to discussions of power and race. Scholars of color who are concerned about appearing objective may constrain their word use in racial scholarship, limiting language that highlights power dynamics. Diluted language might allow scholars of color to appear more objective and less biased in their racial scholarship, but this apparent objectivity comes at the expense of explicitly highlighting the

power dynamics of racial inequality. White scholars, by contrast, may not experience the same pressures to dilute discussions of power.

A second toning down response to objectivity interrogation is using more positive and less negative language. Scholars of color whose racial scholarship is interrogated may use more positive and less negative language to reduce White reviewers' and editors' potential discomfort. This may improve the publication process for scholars of color conducting racial scholarship, but it may have a cost of requiring these scholars to write about topics in a more positive, but less authentic manner. In contrast, we did not expect White scholars to adjust their emotional language.

We test these two possible consequences of objectivity interrogation with an archival analysis of racial scholarship in psychology and management journals over more than 70 years. Through linguistic text analysis (Pennebaker et al. 2015), we examined whether scholars of color and White scholars exhibited different language related to power and emotion. We conducted this analysis for a) general psychology and management journals and b) journals devoted to racial scholarship to determine if these patterns were more or less likely in journals more amenable to racial scholarship.

Methods

We first created an archive of scientific abstracts on racial scholarship by scraping key information from a total of 32 psychology and management journals on PubMed. This information included article titles, author names, abstract content, keywords, and publication dates (range: 1945-2021). We explicitly included 7 specialty journals focused on race or culture (e.g., *Journal of Black Psychology*) and a range of journals that varied in impact factors ($M = 8.26$, $SD = 6.23$, range: 1.11, 24.61). We account for differential self-presentation in general journals (versus race specialty journals), because general journals tend to have primarily White audiences (e.g., Roberts et al., 2020) and may therefore be particularly likely to elicit toning down practices.

We focused on articles about race-related topics. First, we developed a list of 169 race-related keywords by pulling keywords from the first 100 results after querying “race” on each journal’s website. We also included race-relevant keywords from prior research on racial scholarship (e.g., Roberts et al., 2020). Pulling articles that featured these keywords left us with 1,688 article observations from 26 journals ($n = 621$, specialty race journals; $n = 1061$, general journals).

We next determined the apparent racial identity of each article’s first author using two methods. We first used the *predictrace* package in R, which coded the authors as either White or scholars of color based on their names. Authors’ likely race was then confirmed manually by a team of research assistants, who sought additional information about the authors’ self-identified racial category and ethno-racial origins from their websites. This resulted in a total sample of racial scholarship manuscripts by 996 White lead authors and 692 lead authors of color. Analyses focus on lead author race because APA guidelines state that lead authors make the most critical writing decisions within journal articles (American Psychological Association, 2019). We also conducted analyses related to the last author’s apparent race, authorship team diversity, and lead author h-index (see supplementary materials; results were similar to those reported here excluding the case of positive language).

We conducted text analysis of the abstracts using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) language analysis software (Pennebaker et al. 2015). We focused on power (e.g., authoritarian, abuse, control, elite, tyranny), positive emotion (e.g., friendly, happy, optimism), and negative emotion language (e.g., fear, depressed, disdain, hopeless) by drawing on LIWC-2022’s related dictionaries (e.g., Pennebaker et al., 2015). Analyses controlled for word count ($M = 163.70$, $SD = 46.76$). Words related to power ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 2.89$), positive affect ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.99$), and negative affect ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 2.43$) were all used by authors in their abstracts.

Results

Two analyses tested differences in power and emotion language in racial scholarship. We first treated lead author race and journal type as two between-subjects quasi-experimental factors in a 2 (author race) x 2 (journal type) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). We then used a linear mixed-effects model to assess power, positive, and negative language use as a function of fixed effects for race, journal type, and their interaction, with journal as a random effect, controlling for fixed effects for word count, journal impact factor, and publication year. Results were largely consistent.

Turning to power language usage, ANOVA results indicated significant main effects of scholar race $F(1,1683) = 5.694, p = .017$ and journal type $F(1,1683) = 15.437, p < .001$, with a non-significant interaction $F(1,1683) = 0.717, p = .397$. Controlling for word count, power language use was more prevalent in racial scholarship in general journals ($M = 3.55$) than specialty ones ($M = 2.91$). Critically, scholars of color ($M = 3.04$) were less likely to use power language (e.g., abuse, control, elite) in their published racial scholarship relative to their White counterparts ($M = 3.42$).

Turning next to positive language usage, ANOVA results indicated significant main effects of scholar race $F(1,1683) = 11.188, p < .001$ and journal type $F(1,1683) = 7.130, p = .008$, with a non-significant interaction $F(1,1683) = 3.080, p = .079$. As anticipated, scholars of color ($M = 2.53$) were more likely to use positive language (e.g., friendly, grateful) in their published racial scholarship than White scholars ($M = 2.16$). Positive language was also more prevalent in general journals ($M = 2.49$) than in journals devoted to racial scholarship ($M = 2.19$).

ANOVA results for negative language indicated no main effect of scholar race $F(1,1683) = 0.285, p = .594$, a main effect of journal type $F(1,1683) = 6.554, p = .011$, and an interaction $F(1,1683) = 8.660, p = .003$. Scholars of color used more negative language in racial scholarship published in specialty journals ($M = 2.57$) than general journals ($M = 1.83$). White scholars did not use differential negative language for general ($M = 2.29$) or specialty journals ($M = 2.25$).

The mixed model analysis predicting power, positive, and negative language usage revealed similar results as the ANOVA: Scholars of color were less likely to use power-related language ($B = -.20$, $SE = .079$, $t(1679.63) = -2.476$, $p = .013$) and more likely to use positive language ($B = .18$, $SE = .054$, $t(1678.61) = 3.209$, $p = .001$) in their published racial scholarship relative to White scholars. A significant interaction between journal type and lead author race emerged predicting negative language use $B = .22$, $SE = .07$, $t(1680.72) = 3.278$, $p = .001$. As in our ANOVA analysis, scholars of color used more negative language in specialty race journals than general journals; White scholars did not show this pattern. Full model results appear in the supplementary materials.

Overall, these archival analyses provide initial linguistic evidence for the toning down strategies that scholars of color conducting racialized scholarship described in interviews. Across analyses, results indicate that scholars of color publishing racial scholarship tend to use less power-related and more positive language than White scholars. Moreover, in the case of negative language, scholars of color were particularly likely to use these toning down strategies when publishing in general journals rather than specialty journals.

General Discussion

Across one qualitative interview study and one quantitative archival analysis of published abstracts in psychology and management, we examined scholars of colors' experiences conducting scholarship related to race. Scholars of color report facing interrogations of their objectivity—interrogations that implicate their research as flawed on both ideological and methodological grounds. Our studies also reveal how scholars of color contend with these interrogations: In both our interview and archival analysis, scholars of color tended to use self-presentational strategies that make the work more palatable to (mostly White; e.g., Roberts et al., 2020) academic audiences, including toning down their communication. Scholars of color also reported employing higher standards of quantification and evidence that were, at times, specifically tied to expectations of

interrogation of their objectivity. Overall, these studies reveal the additional challenges scholars of color face when conducting racial scholarship, challenges that their White counterparts largely did not report facing, and the implications for how scholars of color are socialized to discuss race and racism in academic audiences—by using less power-related and more positive language.

The fields of psychology and management are dominated by research with White participant samples, White authorship teams, and White editors and reviewers (e.g., Roberts et al., 2020). Our studies help articulate how this context shapes the experiences of scholars of color who are conducting research (on race and racism) that is counter normative to these conditions. The first contribution of this research is that it illuminates scholars of color's experiences in their own words. The phenomenon of objectivity interrogation merits further empirical scrutiny with qualitative and quantitative methodologies, revealing the extent of objectivity interrogation and its costs on individual scholars, the social sciences, and our society (e.g., Torrez et al., 2024; Wallace et al., 2024).

This research can help us understand the potential costs of objectivity interrogation in relation to efforts to diversify academia. Given the extraordinary questioning that scholars of color report receiving, many scholars of color could have their careers delayed or derailed by this process. In the fields of psychology and management, PhD degree holders outnumber tenure track jobs by several orders of magnitude. If scholars of color receive additional scrutiny of their ideology and methodology when conducting racial scholarship, as we observed in these interviews, then these scholars must overcome additional barriers to meet standards for hiring, promotion, and tenure—barriers that are specific to objectivity interrogation.

This research also informs us about the costs of objectivity interrogation for scholars of color conducting racial scholarship even in the best-case scenario—when scholars of color persist in their research on race and racism and go onto successful careers, with many scholarly publications. Specifically, toning down practices ensure that scholars of color publish about race and racism with

fewer mentions of power (e.g., abuse, control) and greater mentions of positivity (e.g., harmony, bonding), as our archival analysis suggests. These linguistic choices obscure the central role of power relations in the context of racism and hinder authentic expression for scholars of color.

Despite the numerous strengths of this research, there are several limitations that warrant further scrutiny. The research focuses on psychology and management scholarship on race and racism, and it does so from a US lens. This is a narrow context for understanding the dynamics of objectivity interrogation in the social sciences and limits understanding about how these processes play out in other regions and cultural contexts. Moreover, while the research focuses specifically on interrogations of racial scholarship conducted by scholars of color, these processes may play out with respect to gender, religion, sexual orientation, and other identity categories relevant to social science research. Though we cannot know the answer to these questions from this investigation, it is generative to think about objectivity interrogation in those contexts.

The present work begins to illuminate how objectivity norms shape the evaluation of social scientists of color studying race. However, additional work is necessary to further clarify the process and consequences articulated here. This includes experimental work, already ongoing in other domains (e.g., Torrez et al., 2024; Wallace et al., 2024). Qualitative work is also worth pursuing, particularly in social science disciplines and departments less dominated by positivism. Such work can help clarify how to conduct and support racial scholarship that minimizes the objectivity interrogations articulated in these scholar interviews.

Objectivity is a foundational tenet of the scientific process. Simultaneously, racism continues to pervade society (Seamster & Ray, 2018). Academia denies objectivity to scholarship that unequivocally names racialized power dynamics—this is inconsistent with reality, and even dangerous. We used scholar interviews and archival analysis to examine how objectivity norms disproportionately implicate racial scholarship conducted by scholars of color and thus influences

these scholars' self-presentation, ultimately shaping how race relations are discussed in academic work. Altogether, these findings have implications for the success of scholars of color conducting racial scholarship—scholars who are likely to face increased scrutiny in academia and expend greater effort to align their scholarship with the status quo. Without careful attention to the downstream consequences of traditional objectivity norms, our adherence to its practices can reproduce the exact kinds of racial inequality social science scholars often seek to describe and remedy.

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Supplementary Analyses

In our archival analysis, we conducted a series of alternative linear mixed models that examined language use as a function lead author race, journal type, the interaction between race and journal type, lead author h-index from google scholar ($n = 1192$, $M = 32.59$, $SD = 27.46$), last author race ($n_{white} = 1041$, $n_{rm} = 354$), and authorship team diversity where a score of “1” indicates all scholars of color on an authorship team and a score of “0” indicates all White scholars ($M = 0.256$, $SD = 0.312$). For author race, “1” was given to scholars of color and “0” to White scholars. The analysis of power language found the same effect as reported in the paper, with scholars of color using less power language than White scholars. In the model, authors with higher h-index used less power language (see Table S1).

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	3.301415	1.701713	971	1.940	.053
Racial identity	-.341277	.165071	939.458	-2.067	.039
Specialty journal	-.353477	.130885	.686	-2.701	.309
Race X journal	.001644	.103381	970.878	.016	.987
H-index	-.009853	.003333	666.052	-2.957	.003
Last Author Race	-.016639	.162014	970.352	-.103	.918
Diversity	.350697	.644980	970.794	.544	.587

The linear mixed model examining positive language differed slightly from the paper. Instead of a main effect for lead author race we found a significant interaction between journal type and lead author race, such that scholars of color were particularly likely to use positive language for general, versus race specialty journals, whereas White scholars tended to do the opposite (Table S2).

Table S2. Linear mixed model analysis of positive language

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	2.163637	1.176644	971	1.839	.066
Racial identity	.136411	.113787	964.363	1.199	.231
Specialty journal	-.183934	.114946	8.805	-1.600	.145
Race X journal	-.160679	.071367	970.925	-2.251	.025
H-index	.003067	.002311	933.058	1.327	.185
Last Author Race	.037560	.111807	970.212	.336	.737
Diversity	.285379	.445089	969.853	.641	.522

The linear mixed model for negative language showed a similar effect as the one reported in the paper. We found a significant interaction between lead author race and journal type such that scholars of color were particularly likely to use negative language for race specialty journals (Table S3).

Table S3. Linear mixed model analysis for negative language

Parameter	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	2.350054	1.378450	971	1.705	.089
Racial identity	.066814	.132524	962.248	.504	.614
Specialty journal	.234072	.163636	13.197	1.430	.176
Race X journal	.191199	.083250	970.544	2.297	.022
H-index	.000222	.002707	944.436	.082	.935
Last Author Race	.017781	.130358	968.719	.136	.892
Diversity	-.746923	.518856	967.849	-1.440	.150

We also employed models controlling for journal impact factor and publication date, which were modeled at the level of the journal and author respectively. Full model parameters for the linear mixed models examining power (Table S4), positive (Table S5), and negative (Table S6) language are displayed below.

Table S4. Linear mixed model predicting power language

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	-69.546028	22.975396	765.317	-3.027	0.003
Racial identity	-0.196331	0.079292	1679.628	-2.476	0.013
Specialty journal	-0.362726	0.179096	5.530	-2.025	0.093
Race X journal	0.092667	0.079554	1679.141	1.165	0.244
Word count	-0.001877	0.001782	1344.931	-1.054	0.292
Impact	-0.051597	0.026961	10.133	-1.914	0.084
Year	0.036443	0.011452	764.812	3.182	0.002

Table S5. Linear mixed model predicting positive language

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	-52.883488	15.331619	628.921	-3.449	0.001
Racial identity	0.175209	0.054605	1678.611	3.209	0.001
Specialty journal	-0.228583	0.079453	5.972	-2.877	0.028
Race X journal	-0.073760	0.054780	1678.173	-1.346	0.178
Word count	-0.001073	0.001209	1154.367	-0.887	0.375
Impact	-0.031339	0.014606	43.341	-2.146	0.038
Year	0.027608	0.007642	622.847	3.613	0.000

Table S6. Linear mixed model predicting negative language

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	4.699583	19.578874	1246.936	0.240	0.810
Racial identity	-0.037075	0.067211	1680.832	-0.552	0.581
Specialty journal	0.116719	0.166350	14.270	0.702	0.494
Race X journal	0.221041	0.067435	1680.723	3.278	0.001
Word count	0.000944	0.001514	1564.141	0.623	0.533
Impact	0.002924	0.024525	21.956	0.119	0.906
Year	-0.001392	0.009759	1240.673	-0.143	0.887