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# Color-Blind Racial Attitudes, Social Dominance Orientation, Racial-Ethnic Group Membership and College Students' Perceptions of Campus Climate

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## Abstract

Racial-ethnic group membership, color-blind racial attitudes (i.e., unawareness of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues), and social dominance orientation were used to predict perceptions of campus climate in general and specifically for people of color among a sample of 144 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students at a predominately White university. Results indicate that after controlling for racial-ethnic minority status, perceptions of "general campus climate" (GCC) and "racial-ethnic campus climate" (RECC) are predicted by color-blind racial attitudes. Post hoc analyses indicated that

unawareness of racial privilege partially mediated the relationship between race and RECC and fully mediated the relationship between race and GCC. Individuals with higher levels of color-blind racial attitudes tend to perceive the campus climate more positively. Implications for research, training and practice are discussed.

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Over the past four decades there has been increasing diversity on college and university campuses around the country ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2003](#)). As a result, colleges and universities, like other institutions, are engaged in systematic efforts to become more proficient, knowledgeable, and responsive with respect to multicultural concerns ([American Psychological Association \[APA\], 2002](#)). Over a decade ago, the [American Association of Colleges and Universities \(AACU\) \(1995\)](#) challenged higher education institutions to create and articulate a commitment to inclusion, fairness, and equality by developing inclusive environments that ideally cultivate diversity and celebrate differences and in which all people are welcomed, heard, and valued equally. Since then, the mandate to educate all students to live and work in a pluralistic society has become so critical that it has been argued that improving campus diversity should be the preeminent criterion for defining academic excellence in the 21st century ([Allen, 2005](#); [Bowen & Bok, 1998](#); [Grieger & Tolliver, 2001](#); [Gurin, 1999](#); [Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998](#)). The consensus among educators over the past 20 years suggests that diversity on college campuses is associated with the following: (a) greater learning, (b) increased interpersonal competencies, (c) greater self-confidence among students, (d) fewer irrational prejudices, (e) greater gains in critical thinking, and (f) greater involvement in civic and community service ([Antonio, 2001](#); [Blimling, 2001](#); [Chang, 1996](#); [Gurin, 1999](#); [Hurtado, 2001](#); [Smith & Associates, 1997](#)).

Despite increases in diversity, researchers have suggested that members of historically underrepresented groups tend to perceive the campus climate quite differently than their majority group peers—more often perceiving the environment as unwelcoming or unsupportive ([Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000](#); [Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999](#); [Cress & Ikeda, 2003](#); [Hurtado, 1994](#)). Thus, researchers have begun to systematically study students' perceptions of the campus climate, or their current perceptions of how diversity issues are addressed on campus. For example, Gloria and colleagues ([Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005](#); [Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001](#); [Gloria & Ho, 2003](#); [Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001](#); [Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999](#)) conducted a series of studies to determine how perceptions of campus climate affect academic persistence decisions and attitudes toward professional help-seeking of racial ethnic minority undergraduate students. Social support (perceived social support from family and friends; mentoring within the academic setting) was the strongest predictor of academic persistence for all minority groups, and positive perceptions of the university environment were particularly important for African Americans, Latino American, and American Indians. [Gloria et al. \(2001\)](#) found that White students reported more positive perceptions of the university environment, higher cultural congruity, and more positive help-seeking attitudes than racial and ethnic minority students. This indicates that the campus environment is less consistent with the cultural experiences and personal development of minority students, which is likely to influence their perceptions of the quality of the environment and willingness to utilize nonacademic student services, potentially leading to a greater chance of academic nonpersistence for racial ethnic minority undergraduate students.

Furthermore, [Ancis et al. \(2000\)](#) studied the campus cultural climate of a large mid-Atlantic university and found significant differences between racial-ethnic groups regarding perceptions of campus climate related to (a) racial-ethnic hostility, (b) pressure to conform to stereotypes, (c) inequitable treatment by faculty, staff, and teaching assistants, (d) residence hall tensions, (e) faculty racism, and (f) cross-cultural comfort. Whites consistently held more favorable views of the campus cultural climate than African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans, and there were occasional differences in perceptions among racial-ethnic group members.

[Johnson \(2003\)](#) also explored student perceptions of climate, specifically in residence halls. Like [Gloria et al. \(2001\)](#) and [Ancis et al. \(2000\)](#), she found that at one Northeastern predominantly White university, students of color perceive the racial climate differently than White students. Given that students often spend more time in their residence halls than in the classroom ([Johnson, 2003](#)), how the residence hall climate is perceived can have significant influence on student learning and the overall collegiate experience. While she did not find significant differences among racial-ethnic minority groups, she did find that White students had a much more positive perception of the racial climate in the residence halls than racial-

ethnic minority students.

In the current study, we investigated students' perceptions of general campus climate as well as campus climate for racial-ethnic minorities. Perception of campus climate for racial-ethnic minorities (RECC) was operationalized as the perception of "campus acceptance" of African Americans, Asian Americans, Middle Easterners, Native Americans, and Latinos. General campus climate (GCC) was defined as perceptions of the campus regarding the extent to which it was "open", "friendly", "respectful", "concerned", "communicative", and "improving" in general. Based on the aforementioned campus climate research, we hypothesized that GCC and RECC would be perceived more positively by Whites than by people of color.

Despite a relatively consistent set of research findings demonstrating differences among racial-ethnic groups in perceptions of campus climate and the impact of these differences on academic persistence decisions and help-seeking attitudes, very little research has been done to examine the sources of these differences outside of global proxy variables related to racial-ethnic group memberships. Thus, the study of racial attitudes on predominantly White college campuses appears to be one of the most promising areas of inquiry regarding the campus climate for people of color. In particular, recent conceptualizations of *social dominance orientation* (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and *color-blind racial attitudes* (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee & Browne, 2000; Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001) appear to provide heuristic value in understanding differences in perceptions of campus climate. Specifically, individual preconceptions about the acceptability of the social dominance of one group over another (i.e., social dominance orientation) and the extent to which individuals believe that race is an unimportant factor in social discourse (i.e., color-blind racial attitudes) are likely to predict perceptions of campus climate at predominantly White universities.

Incorporating psychological, sociological, and evolutionary constructs, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) defined social dominance orientation (SDO) as "a very general individual differences orientation expressing the value that people place on nonegalitarian and hierarchically structured relationships among social groups...[which] expresses general support for the domination of certain socially constructed groups over other socially constructed groups" (p. 61). SDO has been empirically correlated to political conservatism, racial-ethnic prejudice, sexism, and a host of other prejudicial attitudes, and has been described as a unifying construct in explaining oppressive attitudes and behaviors among individuals and societies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Given Whites' dominant role in defining the political, legal, social, and cultural dimension of the United States society, it is logical to suggest that Whites will have a stronger orientation toward social dominance than racial-ethnic minorities. In addition, based on its relationship with other beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions, we hypothesized that SDO would predict perceptions of campus climate (i.e., both GCC and RECC).

Neville and colleagues have articulated a conceptual framework and scale to assess color-blind racial attitudes (CoBRA). "Simply, color-blind racial attitudes refers to the belief that race should not and does not matter" (Neville et al., 2001; p. 60). CoBRAs are new forms of racial attitudes that are related to, but distinct from, racial prejudice. As society becomes increasingly more diverse, and political correctness has become an influential aspect of public social discourse, notions of what are considered to be acceptable expressions of racial attitudes also change (Neville et al., 2000). As a result, many individuals might be willing to refrain from expressing overt racial prejudice, while simultaneously continuing to hold racial attitudes that blame people of color for unequal outcomes in educational, occupational, and economic contexts. According to Neville and colleagues, CoBRAs have three main dimensions, namely (a) unawareness of racial privilege (e.g., race does not determine who is successful and who is not), (b) covert denial of institutional racism (e.g., affirmative action is a discriminatory practice against White people), and (c) overt denial of blatant racial discrimination (e.g., racism is not a contemporary social problem). Given that Whites have the privilege of ignoring race and the potential to benefit from being White due to their prestige and power in U.S. society (Neville et al., 2001), we assert that Whites will have higher levels of all three color-blind racial attitudes than people of color and that color-blind racial attitudes will predict perceptions of campus climate (i.e., both GCC and RECC).

In summary, the purpose of the present study is to extend previous research that examines perceptions of campus climate by investigating social attitudes (i.e., color-blind racial attitudes and social dominance) that could explain the differential perceptions of campus climate for White and racial ethnic minority students. In addition, the present study attempts to examine two dimensions of campus climate, namely perceptions of GCC and RECC.

## Method

### Participants

One hundred–forty–four undergraduate, graduate, and professional students were participants in this study. The sample included 91 (63.2%) women and 53 (36.8%) men. The sample contained students in the following age ranges: 22 and under ( $n = 102$ ), 23–32 years ( $n = 29$ ), 33–42 years ( $n = 9$ ), 43–52 years ( $n = 2$ ), and 53 and over ( $n = 2$ ). There were 111 undergraduate, 12 graduate, and 21 professional students in the sample. The sample contained students in the following racial–ethnic groups: 22 African American (18.1%), 22 Asian/Pacific Islander (15.3%), 2 Middle Eastern (1.4%), 2 Native American/Alaskan Native (1.4%), 7 Chicano/Latino/Hispanic (4.9%), and 94 White/Caucasian (65.3%). (Note: these categories were not mutually exclusive and respondents could check all that applied; thus the sample contained approximately 5 students who were biracial/multiethnic).

### Instruments

#### *Assessment of Campus Climate for Underrepresented Groups (URG; Rankin, 2000)*

Perceptions of RECC were measured by a composite of five items on the *URG* in response to the stem, “How would you rate the overall campus climate for diversity in regards to the following groups?” referring to (a) African American, (b) Asian/Pacific Islander, (c) Middle Eastern, (d) Native American/Alaskan Native and (e) Chicano/Latino/Hispanic. The items were rated on a 5–point Likert–type scale ranging from *not at all accepting* (1) to *very accepting* (5). Lower scores reflect more positive perceptions of campus climate.

Perceptions of GCC were measured by a composite of six items on the *URG* in response to the stem, “Please rate the campus climate in general using the following scale.” Each of the six items were 5–point semantic differential scales along the following bipolar dimensions: (a) friendly–hostile, (b) communicative–reserved, (c) concerned–indifferent, (d) respectful–disrespectful, (e) improving–worsening, and (f) cooperative–uncooperative. Lower scores reflect more positive perceptions of campus climate. Both composite item–groups (i.e., perceptions of campus climate for racial–ethnic minority group members and in general) were produced via exploratory factor analysis conducted by the first author of 3223 cases of data from an institutional campus climate study. Internal consistency estimates for the current sample were as follows: .90 and .90 (for the racial–ethnic climate and general climate, respectively). Additional evidence of the validity of these composite scales can be obtained from the first author.

#### *Color–Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS; Neville et al., 2000)*

The CoBRAS is a 20–item scale designed to measure three dimensions of color–blind racial attitudes: (a) *Unawareness of Racial Privilege*, (b) *Institutional Discrimination*, and (c) *Blatant Racial Issues*. Example items include, “White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin” (reverse scored) (*Unawareness of Racial Privilege*) “Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people,” (*Institutional Discrimination*) and “Social problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations” (*Blatant Racial Issues*). Items are scored on a 6–point Likert–type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). [Neville and colleagues \(2000\)](#) have provided substantial evidence of scale reliability and validity. For example, they found that the CoBRAS was highly correlated with other measures of racism and belief in a just world. In addition, they found Cronbach alphas ranging from .70 (Blatant Racial Issues) to .86 (CoBRAS total) and a 2–week test–test reliability of .68 for the total scale. Internal consistency estimates for the current study were as follows:  $\alpha = .80$  for *Unawareness of Racial Privilege*;  $\alpha = .78$  for *Institutional Discrimination*; and  $\alpha = .74$  for *Blatant Racial Issues*.

#### *Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDS; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999)*

The SDS is a 14-item instrument designed to measure the theoretical construct of social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Respondents are asked to rate each item with respect to the degree of positive or negative feelings they hold toward the objects or statements that are contained in the items. Items are rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from *very negative* (1) to *very positive* (7). Examples of items include the following: "Some groups of people are simply not the equals of others," and "Increased social equality". Various versions of the scale have been developed and refined over the course of more than 45 studies since 1979. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) report extensive validity evidence for the scale, and internal consistencies that range from .70 to .89. Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .93.

## Procedure

This study occurred as part of an institutional campus climate study at a large, predominantly White, Midwestern university. Data were collected via Internet-based procedures. The institutional climate study was publicized widely prior to and during data collection via newsprint and radio press releases, and mass E-mail announcements and requests for participation. Potential respondents received mass E-mail announcements on two occasions during the course of a single academic semester. Respondents could access a web-site containing the informed consent page for the climate study directly from a link contained in the E-mail. A link containing the words "I agree" was provided at the bottom of the informed consent page that routed participants to the demographic page of the URG. Based on demographic responses, a participant was randomly assigned to 1 of 13 different substudies. The process of random assignment to one of the substudies in the pool occurred within less than one second elapsed time after clicking the submit button on the demographics page. Data completed on one web-page followed participants through to the end of the final questionnaire and was then transmitted via FTP (file transfer protocol) to a secure data file on a server behind a firewall. Data on the server could only be accessed by the primary investigators via password protected access. Once participants completed the entire set of questionnaires, they were given the opportunity to submit an E-mail registration for a raffle drawing for various items including free parking, free textbooks, and concert tickets.

There are two main concerns with Internet-based data collection. First, there exists a possibility that participants may submit completed surveys more than once. Second, Internet-based data collection is vulnerable to malicious responding. To address these concerns, we followed the recommendations of Schmidt (1997); Smith and Leigh (1997), and Mohr and Rochlen (1999). Namely, we identified duplicate surveys by using date, time, and origin of submission or Internet protocol (IP) addresses. When duplicate entries were identified, we examined to see if the duplicate survey appeared to be submitted accidentally from the same IP address (i.e., two identical cases submitted within a minute or two), or if it appeared to be malicious responding (i.e., random patterns of responding). If the duplication was determined to be accidental, one survey from the pair was eliminated. If the duplication was determined to be malicious, both surveys were eliminated.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Nineteen cases contained missing data and were deleted from analyses, and those cases were not reported as part of the description of participants. Intercorrelations for the variables used in this study are provided in Table 1. All continuous measured variables were assessed to determine whether they met the assumption for normality on the basis of skewness and kurtosis. According to Kline (2005), using conservative estimates, variables with absolute values of skewness greater than 3.0 and kurtosis greater than 8.0 may indicate problems with normality. On the basis of the criteria recommended by Kline, none of the variables in the current study were assessed to be problematic. Effects of multicollinearity and suppression were evaluated but not observed during the analyses.

**Table 1**  
*Intercorrelations Between Demographic, Predictor and Criterion Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Racial-ethnic climate	—							
General climate	.59*	—						
Gender	-.03	.05	—					
Race-ethnicity	.39*	.25*	.08	—				
Unawareness of Racial Privilege	-.38*	-.47*	-.10	-.41*	—			
Institutional Discrimination	-.31*	-.23*	.21*	-.45*	.50*	—		
Blatant Racial Issues	-.24*	-.28*	.14	-.26*	.52*	.59*	—	
Social Dominance Orientation	-.05	.03	.29*	-.16	.20*	.53*	.54*	—

Note. N = 144. \* = significant at alpha < .05.

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Intercorrelations Between Demographic, Predictor and Criterion Variables

We examined whether age group (typical college-age vs. nontypical college age students) was related to perceptions of GCC and RECC. Both of these analyses were nonsignificant,  $F(1, 143) = .158, p = .692$  for RECC, and  $F(1, 142) = 1.79, p = .183$  for GCC. In addition, we conducted a similar set of ANOVAs for participant gender (men vs. women), which were also nonsignificant,  $F(1, 143) = .120, p = .729$  for RECC, and  $F(1, 142) = .312, p = .577$  for GCC. Thus, we did not utilize age or gender groupings in any further analyses.

In order to test our hypothesis that Whites would report more positive perceptions of campus climate, greater levels of color-blind racial attitudes (i.e., unawareness of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant social issues), and greater orientation toward social dominance than people of color, we conducted a one-way multivariate analysis of variance. In this analysis, racial-ethnic group membership was included as the grouping variable (i.e., Whites vs. people of color), whereas dependent variables included perceptions of RECC, perceptions of GCC, unawareness of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, blatant racial issues, and social dominance orientation. A significant omnibus test was obtained for this analysis, Wilks  $\Lambda(6, 136) = .710, p < .001, \eta^2 = .290$ . In order to control for family wise error, we set alpha at .008. We found significant univariate  $F$  tests for RECC,  $F(1, 143) = 23.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .155$ , GCC,  $F(1, 143) = 6.06, p < .003, \eta^2 = .064$ , unawareness of racial privilege  $F(1, 143) = 27.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = .162$ , institutional discrimination,  $F(1, 143) = 34.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .195$ , and blatant racial issues,  $F(1, 143) = 9.81, p < .003, \eta^2 = .065$ . The univariate  $F$  test for SDO was not significant,  $F(1, 143) = 6.21, p > .05, \eta^2 = .027$ . Compared to people of color, Whites reported more positive perceptions of RECC and GCC, as well as greater unawareness of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues. Means and standard deviations for each of these variables are reported by group in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2**  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Study Variables by Racial-ethnic Minority/Majority Group Status*

Group: Variable	Whites		REM		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Racial-ethnic climate	1.87	.76	2.50	.76	2.13	.82
General climate	2.22	.77	2.64	.82	2.39	.82
Unawareness of Racial Privilege	3.75	.88	2.91	.96	3.41	1.02
Institutional Discrimination	3.85	.91	2.92	.96	3.47	1.04
Blatant Racial Issues	2.75	.78	2.30	.94	2.57	.87
Social Dominance Orientation	2.55	1.30	2.13	1.21	2.39	1.28

Note: N = 144. Whites n = 86; REM n = 58. REM = racial ethnic minorities. Lower scores on climate measures correspond to more positive views of campus climate.

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Means and Standard Deviations for Study Variables by Racial-ethnic Minority/Majority Group Status

Estimates of how well the CoBRAS and SDS scores predicted perceptions of RECC were generated with a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, in which we controlled for racial-ethnic group membership by entering it first in the regression model (step 1) before simultaneously entering the three subscales of the CoBRAS and SDS scale scores as predictors (step 2). The results of the hierarchical regression analysis for RECC are presented in [Table 3](#). The cases-to-independent variable ratio for this analysis was 24 to 1, which exceeds minimum requirements for regression analysis ([Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001](#)). Racial-ethnic group membership made a significant contribution,  $F(1, 142) = 24.70, p < .001$ ; with  $R^2 = .148$  (adjusted  $R^2 = .142$ ), indicating that the variance in perceptions of RECC accounted for by racial-ethnic group membership was substantial. After the variability due to racial-ethnic group membership was taken into account, the second block of predictors explained an additional

significant variance,  $R^2$  change = .075,  $F(4, 138)$  change = 3.34,  $p < .05$ ; with  $R^2 = .22$  (adjusted  $R^2 = .20$ ). [Table 3](#) demonstrates that the correlational results change when controlling for racial-ethnic group membership but remain significant for the CoBRAS. Higher CoBRAS scores were associated with more positive perceptions of RECC (i.e., lower scores on the Rankin composite scale score for RECC). Race-ethnicity accounted for the greatest proportion of the variance in campus climate ratings in both models, followed closely by the unawareness of racial privilege subscale of the CoBRAS. However, unawareness of racial privilege seemed to partially mediate the association of racial-ethnic group membership to perceptions of campus climate for persons of color.

**Table 3**  
*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceptions of Racial-Ethnic Campus Climate*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Step 1				
Race-ethnicity	0.64	.13	.39	4.97**
Step 2				
Race-ethnicity	0.41	.15	.25	2.82**
COBRA-URP	-0.17	.08	-.21	-2.21*
COBRA-ID	-0.10	.09	-.13	-1.21
COBRA-BRI	-0.05	.10	-.06	-0.06
SDS	0.08	.06	.13	1.35

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ ; COBRA-URP = Unawareness of Racial Privilege; COBRA-ID = Institutional Discrimination; COBRA-BRI = Blatant Racial Issues; SDS = Social Dominance Scale.

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Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceptions of Racial-Ethnic Campus Climate

A post hoc mediational analysis was conducted to test whether unawareness of racial privilege indeed mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of RECC. For this analysis, we followed the recommendations by [Frazier, Tix, and Barron \(2004\)](#). First, we regressed perceptions of RECC (the outcome) on racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor). The unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_c = .64$ ,  $s_c = .13$ ) associated with the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on RECC (Path c) was significant ( $p < .01$ ). Second, we regressed unawareness of racial privilege (the mediator) on racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) testing Path a. Again, we found that the unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_a = -.84$ ,  $s_a = .16$ ) associated with the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on unawareness of racial privilege was significant ( $p < .001$ ). Then, we regressed perceptions of RECC on racial-ethnic group membership and racial privilege simultaneously. The unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_b = -.22$ ,  $s_b = .07$ ) associated with the relation between unawareness of racial privilege (the mediator) and perceptions of RECC (the outcome) when controlling for racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) was significant, or Path b ( $p < .001$ ). However, because the unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_c = .46$ ,  $s_c = .13$ ) associated with racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) and perceptions of RECC (the outcome), or Path c, was significant ( $p < .001$ ), we needed to test whether a mediation effect truly existed. Thus, we used [Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger's \(1998\)](#) method for testing the significance of mediated effects. Kenny and colleagues developed an equation that takes into account standard error, thus dividing the mediated effect by a standard error. Accordingly, we multiplied the unstandardized regression weights for the relation between racial-ethnic group membership and unawareness of racial privilege ( $\beta_a = -.84$ ) and the relation between unawareness of racial privilege and perceptions of RECC when controlling for racial-ethnic group members ( $\beta_b = -.22$ ) and divided this product by the square root of  $b^2s_a^2 + a^2s_b^2 + s_a^2s_b^2$ . This equation yielded a significant z-score of 2.76 ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting that unawareness of racial privilege did *partially* mediate the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of RECC. By dividing the products of  $\beta_a$  and  $\beta_b$  by  $\beta_c$ , (the unstandardized regression coefficients), we were able to determine that 28% of the total effect of racial-ethnic group membership on perceptions of RECC is mediated by unawareness of racial privilege.

We conducted another hierarchical multiple regression analysis examining perceptions of GCC, in which we controlled for racial-ethnic group membership by entering it first in the regression model (step 1) before simultaneously entering the CoBRAS and SDS scale scores as predictors (step 2). The results of this hierarchical regression analysis are presented in [Table 4](#). Racial-ethnic group membership made a significant contribution,  $F(1, 141) = 9.66$ ,  $p < .01$ ; with  $R^2 =$

.064 (adjusted  $R^2 = .06$ ), indicating that the variance in perceptions of GCC accounted for by racial-ethnic group membership was low. After the variability due to racial-ethnic group membership was taken into account, the second block of predictors explained an additional significant variance,  $R^2$  change = .194,  $F(4, 137)$  change = 8.976,  $p < .001$ ; with  $R^2 = .26$  (adjusted  $R^2 = .23$ ). Higher CoBRAS scores were associated with more positive perceptions of GCC (i.e., lower scores on the Rankin composite scale score for GCC); however, unawareness of racial privilege accounted for the greatest proportion of the variance in campus climate ratings in all three models, followed by racial-ethnic membership and SDO. In addition, the second group of predictors, particularly unawareness of racial privilege and social dominance, appeared to completely mediate the association between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of GCC, reducing the relationship to zero (*ns*).

Table 4  
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceptions of General Campus Climate

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Step 1				
Race-ethnicity	0.42	.14	.25	3.11**
Step 2				
Race-ethnicity	0.14	.14	.08	0.98
COBRA-URP	-0.31	.08	-.38	-4.07**
COBRA-ID	-0.02	.08	-.02	-0.21
COBRA-BRI	-0.16	.10	-.17	-1.60
SDS	0.14	.06	.23	2.37*

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ ; COBRA-URP = Unawareness of Racial Privilege; COBRA-ID = Institutional Discrimination; COBRA-BRI = Blatant Racial Issues; SDS = Social Dominance Scale.

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Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceptions of General Campus Climate

A post hoc mediational analysis was conducted to test whether unawareness of racial privilege and social dominance indeed mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of GCC. Again following the recommendations by [Frazier et al. \(2004\)](#), we first regressed GCC (the outcome) on racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor). The unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_c = .42$ ,  $s_c = .13$ ) associated with the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on GCC (Path c) was significant ( $p < .01$ ). Second, we again found that the unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_a = -.84$ ,  $s_a = .16$ ) associated with the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on unawareness of racial privilege, or Path a, was significant ( $p < .001$ ). However, when we regressed social dominance orientation (the mediator) on racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor), we found that the unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta = -.41$ ,  $s = .21$ ) was nonsignificant. Thus, social dominance cannot be a mediator in the relations between racial-ethnic group membership and GCC and was therefore dropped from further analyses. Proceeding with our test of unawareness of racial privilege as a mediator, we regressed perceptions of GCC on racial-ethnic group membership and unawareness of racial privilege simultaneously. The unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_b = -.34$ ,  $s_b = .07$ ) associated with the relation between unawareness of racial privilege (the mediator) and GCC (the outcome) when controlling for racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) was significant, or Path b ( $p < .001$ ). Additionally, the unstandardized regression coefficient ( $\beta_c = .13$ ,  $s_c = .14$ ) associated with racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) and GCC (the outcome), or Path c, was not significant ( $p > .05$ ), suggesting that unawareness of racial privilege fully mediated the relations between racial-ethnic group membership and GCC. To determine whether this was a significant mediation effect, we again used [Kenny et al. \(1998\)](#) method. Accordingly, we multiplied the unstandardized regression weights for the relation between racial-ethnic group membership and unawareness of racial privilege ( $\beta_a = -.84$ ) and the relation between unawareness of racial privilege and GCC when controlling for racial-ethnic group members ( $\beta_b = -.35$ ) and divided this product by the square root of  $b^2 s_a^2 + a^2 s_b^2 + s_a^2 s_b^2$ . This equation yielded a significant z-score of 3.75 ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting that 100% of the total effect of racial-ethnic group membership on GCC was mediated by unawareness of racial privilege.

## Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was twofold: (a) to replicate findings from earlier research demonstrating that Whites as a group tend to perceive campus climate more positively than racial-ethnic minorities, and (b) to examine the degree to which perceptions of campus climate for racial-ethnic minorities and general campus climate were predicted by color-blind racial attitudes and social dominance orientation. Earlier findings for the differences between Whites and racial-ethnic minorities in perceptions of campus climate were replicated in the current study (e.g., [Ancis et al., 2000](#); [Gloria et al., 2001](#); [Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998](#); [Johnson, 2003](#)). More importantly, after controlling for racial-ethnic group membership, results showed that color-blind racial attitudes predicted perceptions of RECC and GCC, whereas social dominance orientation predicted only GCC. Specifically, unawareness of racial privilege was associated with more positive perceptions of both RECC and GCC. This finding supports the speculations of [Helm et al. \(1998\)](#) when they said: "It is likely that Whites do not see the relevance of their culture to diversity issues because the overall culture on campus has been, and continues to be, designed for them" (p. 115). Social dominance orientation was also associated with more positive perceptions of GCC. Thus, irrespective of racial-ethnic minority status, perceptions of campus climate were found to be more positive when participants tended to deny the existence of racial privilege within intergroup relations. The lack of influence of social dominance orientation, blatant racial issues, and institutional racism on the perceptions of RECC may be explained by the significant effect of unawareness of racial privilege itself. That is, individuals who are not aware of their racial privilege may not understand or perceive the subtle cues of racism on an interpersonal or systemic level ([Neville et al., 2001](#)).

The post hoc tests of mediation highlight the complexity of perceptions of campus climate, especially given that unawareness of racial privilege fully mediated GCC but only partially mediated RECC. Conceptually, unawareness of racial privilege should shift the perceptions of RECC and GCC in the positive direction for both White students and students of color, but the impact might be expected to be greater for RECC than for GCC (the converse of our findings). However, a key difference in ratings of RECC for White students versus students of color is personal experience. That is, on the one hand, ratings of RECC by students of color are likely to be more negative due to personal experiences of discrimination, whereas White students rate RECC more positively because they are less likely to directly experience or understand racial-ethnic discrimination. On the other hand, GCC is tied to the personal experiences of both White students and students of color, which may also explain why White students rated GCC ( $M = 2.22$ ) substantially more negatively than RECC ( $M = 1.87$ ). Thus, the attitudinal variable "unawareness of racial privilege" accounts for only part of the racial-ethnic group membership differences in RECC, but fully mediates the relationship of racial-ethnic group membership on GCC because the latter is more reflective of personal experiences for both groups. Stated another way, part of the reason students of color and White students do not perceive RECC the same is because of differences in the extent to which they tend to recognize and understand racial privilege. However, the majority of this variation is not due to unawareness of racial privilege, but to another factor, which is likely to be that White students and students of color actually have different experiences of racial conflict, pressures to conform to stereotypes, and perceptions of equitable treatment on college campuses (e.g., [Ancis et al., 2000](#)), prompting White students to rate RECC more positively than would students of color. Future research is needed to examine the extent to which personal experiences of discrimination, harassment, or microaggressions mediate between-groups differences in perceptions of RECC.

It has been demonstrated through past research that perceptions of campus climate vary as a function of racial-ethnic minority group status (e.g., [Ancis et al., 2000](#); [Fischer, 2007](#); [Gloria et al., 2001](#); [Helm et al., 1998](#); [Johnson, 2003](#)). However, this is the first investigation of its kind to investigate attitudinal sources of those between group differences. Thus, the current investigation indicates that unawareness of racial privilege is an important variable that might help to explain between group variations and lead to important approaches to assessment and interventions that can be targeted toward more accurate perceptions of campus climate.

The relationships between color-blind racial attitudes and social dominance orientation serve to highlight the implications of our findings for college student development professionals. Specifically, social dominance orientation (i.e., general support for the domination of certain groups over other groups) was moderately correlated with the *blatant racial issues*, (e.g., unawareness to general, pervasive racial discrimination) and *institutional discrimination* (e.g., limited awareness of the implications of institutional forms of racial discrimination and exclusion) subscales of the CoBRAS, indicating that SDO tends to reflect classic conceptions of overt racism. None of these three variables predicted perceptions of the racial-ethnic campus climate. That is, perceptions of RECC are not predicted by perceptions of overt racism after controlling for racial-ethnic group membership. Instead, perceptions of RECC in this study were

associated with awareness/unawareness of racial privilege, a more subtle form of racism viewed by some scholars as more prominent in politically correct environments like higher education institutions.

Clearer understanding of color-blind racial attitudes and social dominance orientation and their associations with perceptions of campus climate will aid professionals in avoiding racial-ethnic and cultural uniformity myths that might lead to mistaken assumptions in their work—assumptions that become even more problematic as the numbers of ethnic minorities increase, including mixed race and multiethnic students (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998). Color-blindness refers to the belief that race should not and does not matter (Neville et al., 2001), and many people advocate for a color-blind approach to diversity in higher education (e.g., Connerly, 2007; Clegg, 2006). It is apparent, however, that race and ethnicity are important in the lived experiences and perceptions of campus climate among members of racial-ethnic minority groups. It is also apparent that those who express an unawareness of racial privilege (*i.e.*, color-blindness) may be more likely to perceive the racial-ethnic campus climate more positively. This is to suggest that stereotypes and racialized campus climate must be viewed through multiple lenses, not only through the lenses of those who experience racial privilege (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Our findings suggest that a color-blind approach is likely to result in perceptions of climate that are potentially more positive than is warranted, and is likely to be at odds with the perceptions of students of color. Thus, educators and policymakers are cautioned against adopting a color-blind racial perspective, and they are encouraged to assist students in the development of greater awareness of issues of racial privilege as a means of helping to improve the overall campus climate for people of color.

There are a number of important limitations that need to be considered within this research. First, the research was conducted at a single, large research university in the Midwest. As such, it is important to understand that these findings do not necessarily generalize to other students at other institutions in other geographic areas or having different institutional characteristics (e.g., mission, size, racial history). Second, there were several systematic influences on the sampling procedure for this investigation, including (a) oversampling of racial-ethnic minority group members, and (b) self-selection bias among individuals participating in this study. The impact of these systematic influences on the sample is not known. Thus generalization of these findings is somewhat limited, despite their consistency with prior research in the area. Finally, the correlational design of the research limits the extent to which causal inferences can be drawn from the findings.

These limitations notwithstanding, the current investigation provides important new insight regarding between-groups differences regarding perceptions of campus climate for diversity. Educators and policymakers should recognize these important findings when working with a diverse student body and be prepared to respond appropriately to them in order to enhance the learning experience for all members of the campus community.

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