The purpose of this study was to examine the relations among racial-ethnic group membership, political ideology (i.e., conservative and liberal), and perceptions of general campus climate (GCC) and of campus climate for racial-ethnic minorities (RECC). One hundred and thirty-six (136) undergraduate, graduate, and professional students participated in this study at a large public Midwestern university. A series of multivariate analyses of variance, hierarchical regressions, and mediation analyses were conducted. Findings indicated that Whites endorsed more positive perceptions of campus climate, reported fewer experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, and endorsed less liberal political ideological beliefs than people of color. No racial differences in conservative ideology emerged. After controlling for racial-ethnic group membership, results showed that experiences of racial-ethnic harassment predicted both GCC and RECC, whereas conservative ideology only predicted RECC. Post hoc analyses demonstrated that experiences of racial-ethnic harassment fully mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and GCC, but only partially mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and RECC. Neither conservative nor liberal ideologies were significant mediators. Implications for future research and practice are provided.

Keywords: political ideology, campus climate, racial-ethnic harassment, race, college students

Today, increasingly more college and university campuses are actively participating in and responding to campus climate research (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998). These studies are intended to assess the climate for diversity and multiculturalism (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998) in the hopes of helping campus leadership make evidence-based decisions in order to improve the climate for everyone. Garcia, Hudgins, Musil, Nettles, Sedlacek, and Smith (2001) have suggested that evaluation research on college campuses should be used to determine whether diversity efforts are successful, whether they can be replicated, and whether they should be abandoned or improved. In addition, they have suggested that diversity research can be used to help communicate the benefits of diversity work and justify their investments in diversity to audiences that may be skeptical of these efforts.

At the same time, the academy is under attack for being a bastion of liberal ideology (American Council of Trustees and Alumni [ACTA], 2005; Bauerlein, 2006; Gravois, 2007; Will, 2007). Although few have publicly connected campus climate research with the liberalization of higher education, the very nature of campus climate research is intended to assess diversity-related outcomes. Moreover, campus climate studies are often conducted from a social justice paradigm. Both a focus on diversity and multiculturalism and a social justice agenda have been targeted as liberal or “leftist” agendas in
academia (D’Souza, 1998, 2002; Horowitz, 2007; Will, 2007). Conservative pundits like George Will (2007) have assailed the academy for what is described as an agenda of indoctrination connoted in words such as “diversity,” “inclusion,” “classism,” “ethnocentrism,” “racism,” “sexism,” “heterosexism,” “ageism,” and “White privilege,” all of which are the language and targets of campus climate research. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that those who view academia as institutions of liberal dogma will also consider campus climate research as a political agenda that contains a liberal or progressive bias.

Responding to concerns about liberal political bias on college and university campuses, Ehrlich and Colby (2004) believe there is a very real issue related to political bias on campus. However, their concern is not the liberal agenda of the academy. Rather, they argue that there is a real issue on campuses if any perspective is silenced, be it conservative or liberal, and strongly advocate that campus leaders “test whether the campus climate seems to some students to stifle minority political opinions” (p. 39).

When considering race and political views, very little is known and much is assumed about college students’ political ideology. The assumption is that most students of color are more liberal than their White peers; however, this is only a guess. Certainly, there is evidence from campus climate research that students of color are more likely to support programs and policies intended to address racial discrimination (Ancis, Sledlacke, & Mohr, 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003), which suggests students of color hold a more liberal position for this particular issue. However, it is difficult to extrapolate from the support of such programs and policies to broader ideological views.

National studies, like Dey and Hurtado (2005) discuss students’ broad political views but do not disaggregate by race. They found that college students in the last 30 years are moving toward the political center, with fewer students identifying as strong liberals or strong conservatives. The distribution is very much in line with a typical bell curve. Dey and Hurtado compared these trends to 18–23 year olds in the broader U.S. population and found the same pattern. It is important to note that, since Dey and Hurtado’s study, the numbers of liberals and conservatives among college and university first year students have increased 1.3% respectively, which is the largest percentage of both categories since 1975; yet, the largest percentage of these students (43.3%) identify as middle of the road politically (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2007).

When we look at race and politics outside of the higher education setting, Branton (2004) examined political attitudes on state-based ballot initiatives. Racial and ethnic minorities in her study were more likely to be liberal (or vote along the Democratic party line) than Whites. Yet, she found that racial minorities and Whites who live in more ethnically diverse communities tend to vote favorably on racially relevant ballot initiatives (e.g., affirmative action) indicating a more liberal perspective. She also found that when initiatives were not explicitly race-focused (e.g., gambling and legalizing medical marijuana), Whites who live in diverse communities did not necessarily align with racial and ethnic minorities.

Just as we know little about college student political ideology by race, no existing model of campus climate research is explicit about measuring race, political ideology, and their roles in shaping campus climate. However, in synthesizing work by Peterson and Spencer (1990) and Hurtado, Milem, et al. (1998), Hart and Fellabaum (2008) argue campus climate research should include the institution’s “historical legacy of diversity and social justice; the structural or demographic diversity of the campus; the perceptions of campus climate by all campus constituencies; and the lived experiences and behaviors of the members of the campus community” (p. 233). They proposed a model focused on diversity for all historically underrepresented populations on campuses but also make room for other characteristics that may influence the perceptions and experiences of the campus climate. This model opens the door to respond to the call in Ehrlich and Colby’s (2004) essay, and the current investigation integrates Hart and Fellabaum’s model to evaluate the extent to which liberal and conservative political ideology and experiences of harassment are associated with perceptions of campus climate.

Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, and Hart (2008) identified two types of perceptions of campus climate: Racial-Ethnic Campus Climate (RECC; i.e., perceptions of campus acceptance of African Americans, Asian Americans,
Middle Easterners, Native Americans, and Latinos) and General Campus Climate (GCC; i.e., perceptions of the campus regarding the extent to which it was “open,” “friendly,” “respectful,” “concerned,” “communicative,” and “improving”). They found that perceptions of both RECC and GCC were predicted by color-blind racial attitudes. However, because color-blind racial attitudes only partially mediated the relationship between RECC and participants’ racial-ethnic backgrounds but fully mediated the relationship between GCC and race/ethnicity, Worthington et al. concluded that another variable (possibly direct experience with harassment) would also be an influence on RECC and GCC. Their findings were also consistent with an expansive list of studies that have reported racial-ethnic differences in perceptions of campus climate (e.g., Ancis et al., 2000; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001; Hurtado, 1994; Johnson, 2003). Specifically, these studies have found that students of color perceive the general campus climate more negatively than their White peers. Studies focusing on the perceptions of racial-ethnic climate similarly found that students of color have a more negative view of the RECC than their White counterparts (Ancis et al., 2000; Johnson, 2003; Pfeifer & Schneider, 1974; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Furthermore, Hurtado (1992), Nora and Cabrera (1996), and Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) reported that students of color experience more racism and harassment on campus than White students.

Whereas previous research has found that students of color experience more racial-ethnic harassment than their White peers on university and college campuses (i.e., Hurtado, 1992; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003), these studies only examine differences in direct experiences with racial-ethnic harassment and thus focus solely on the targets of such harassment. Low and colleagues (2005), however, argue that the narrow focus on direct harassment experiences reinforces the erroneous belief that “ethnic harassment and its negative consequences are restricted only to a small number of ethnic minority individuals” (p. 2291). They provide empirical evidence that people experience racial-ethnic harassment both directly and indirectly (e.g., nontargets who witness incidents of racial-ethnic harassment) and that both direct and indirect experiences of such harassment negatively influenced occupational, health-related, and psychological outcomes for targets and nontargets. Ultimately, they found no ethnic differences in the aforementioned relationships suggesting that racial-ethnic harassment is an important influence in the lives of both persons of color and Whites (Low, Radhakrishnan, Schneider, & Rounds, 2005). Low and colleagues also argue that the impact of racial-ethnic harassment experiences on psychological outcomes is directly related to their level of knowledge about the racial-ethnic harassment of others and/or their own experiences of racial-ethnic harassment. Hence, they use an additive model to conceptualize how racial-ethnic harassment influences psychological, health, and occupational outcomes. Given this, we argue that experiences of racial-ethnic harassment occur on a continuum from witnessing such harassment to being a direct target of such harassment to both witnessing and experiencing such harassment. Finally, given the negative influence of direct and indirect racial-ethnic harassment experiences on other psychological outcomes, it is reasonable to assume that the continuum of racial-ethnic harassment experiences will be negatively associated with perceptions of campus climate (i.e., RECC and GCC).

In the current study, our focus was on the potential influences of racial-ethnic group membership, political ideology (conservative and liberal), and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment on perceptions of RECC and GCC. We first hypothesized that Whites would report more positive perceptions of campus climate (i.e., RECC and GECC) and fewer experiences of racial-ethnic harassment than people of color. At the same time, we explored potential racial-ethnic group membership differences in the endorsement of both conservative and liberal political ideologies. Next, we explored whether political ideology and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment significantly predicted RECC and GCC when controlling for racial-ethnic group membership. If significant predictions arise, then we planned to investigate whether political ideology and experiences of harassment mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and RECC and GCC. However, we hypothesized if such a meditational relationship existed that experiences of
harassment would have a stronger influence than political ideology.

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred and thirty-six (136) university students participated in this study. The sample included 79 (58.1%) women and 57 (41.9%) men. The sample contained students in the following age ranges: 22 and under (n = 95), 23–32 years (n = 28), 33–42 years (n = 8), and 43–52 years (n = 5). There were 100 undergraduate, 9 graduate, and 27 professional (i.e., law, medical, and veterinary medicine) students. The sample contained students in the following racial-ethnic groups: 28 African American (20.6%), 15 Asian/Pacific Islander (11.0%), 2 Middle Eastern (1.5%), 3 Native American/Alaskan Native (2.2%), 8 Chicano/Latino/Hispanic (5.9%), 8 biracial/multiethnic (5.9%), and 80 White/Caucasian (59.3%).

Data were collected via Internet as a part of an institutional campus climate study at a large, predominantly White, Midwestern university. Newsprint and radio press releases and mass E-mail announcements served to publicize the institutional climate study prior to and during data collection. Respondents were recruited by sending mass E-mail announcements on two occasions during the course of a single academic semester. The E-mails contained a link that allowed respondents to access a website containing the informed consent page. A combination of random sampling and oversampling were used to increase the numbers of racial-ethnic minority students in the sample. A sample of 1746 university students, who agreed to participate were routed to the demographic page of the Assessment of Campus Climate for Underrepresented Groups (URG; Rankin, 2000). Based on the demographic responses, participants were randomly assigned to one of 13 different substudies. Thus, the current sample of 136 was randomly selected from the total 1746 student respondents. At completion, participants were given the opportunity to enter in a drawing for various reward items including free parking, free textbooks, and concert tickets.

Two main concerns with Internet-based data collection have been identified: (a) participants may submit surveys more than once, and (b) Internet-based data collection is vulnerable to malicious responding. These concerns were addressed by following the recommendations of Schmidt (1997), Smith and Leigh (1997), and Mohr and Rochlen (1999). We identified duplicate surveys by date, time, and origin of submission or Internet protocol (IP) address. Duplicate entries were reviewed to classify as accidental (i.e., two identical cases submitted within a minute or two) or malicious (i.e., random patterns of responding). Malicious duplications resulted in the elimination of both surveys while accidental duplications resulted in the retention of one survey.

Instruments

Assessment of Campus Climate for Underrepresented Groups (URG; Rankin, 2000). We measured three study variables using components of the Rankin (2000) instrument: RECC, GCC, and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment. 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). Scores represent the average rating across the five items and thus ranged from 1 to 5 with higher scores reflecting 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. Scores represent the average rating across the six items and thus ranged from 1 to 5 with higher scores reflecting more positive perceptions of campus climate. Worthington et al. (2008) used the RECC and GCC scales successfully to demonstrate that individuals with higher levels of color-blind racial attitudes tend to perceive the campus climate more
positively for racial-ethnic minorities and in general. They reported alpha coefficients of .90 for both the RECC and GCC. In the present study, internal consistency estimates were .90 and .90 for RECC and GCC, respectively.

Experiences of racial-ethnic harassment were measured by a weighted composite of six items on the URG. First, participants responded affirmatively or not to the following two questions: (a) “Have you personally experienced harassment (any conduct that has interfered unreasonably with your ability to work or learn) on this campus?” and (b) “have you observed any conduct on this campus that you feel has created an offensive, hostile, intimidating working or learning environment?” If the participants answered yes to the first question, they responded to the stem “Do you feel this conduct was due to your..” in regard to (a) race and (b) ethnicity. If the participants answered yes to the second question, they then responded to the stem “Do you feel that this conduct created an offensive, hostile, or intimidating working or learning environment for persons of different..” in regard to (a) race and (b) ethnicity. Experiences of racial-ethnic harassment were scored 0 for those participants who did not endorse the first two questions (i.e., did not experience and witness racial-ethnic harassment). Scores of .5 corresponded to those participants who only witnessed racial-ethnic harassment, whereas scores of 1 corresponded to those who only experienced racial-ethnic harassment. Scores of 1.5 represented participants who had both personally experienced and witnessed racial-ethnic harassment. Thus, scores ranged from 0 to 1.5 with higher scores indicating more experiences of racial-ethnic harassment. This new measurement strategy is based on Low and colleagues (2005) additive model of racial-ethnic harassment. Additional validity evidence for the RECC, GCC, and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment composite scores can be obtained from the second author.

Social Attitudes Statement Scale (SA-II; Kerlinger, 1970). The SA-II is a 26-item instrument designed to measure the theoretical constructs of Liberalism and Conservatism (Kerlinger, 1970). The scale has 13 liberal and 13 conservative items that were drawn from the best items of the SA-I (40 items). Respondents rated each item with respect to the degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements that are contained in the items. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from agree very strongly (1) to disagree very strongly (6). Examples of items include the following: “Individuals who are against churches and religions should not be allowed to teach in colleges” and “Large fortunes should be taxed fairly heavily over and above income taxes.” Kerlinger (1972) reports extensive validity evidence for the scale and alpha reliability coefficients that range from .74 to .86. Cronbach’s alpha for the current study were .80 and .73 for the liberal and conservative subscales respectively.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to statistically testing our hypotheses, data were screened for missing data and examined for adherence to assumptions of multivariate statistical analyses. First, we deleted 21 cases containing missing data. Those cases were not reported as part of the description of the participants. We then detected one multivariate outlier after reviewing Mahalanobis Distance scores. Thus, 135 of the 136 original participants were included in subsequent data analyses. Next, all continuous variables were assessed to determine if they met the assumption for normality (e.g., skewness less than 3.0 and kurtosis less than 8.0; Kline, 2005), which they did (see Table 1). Then, data were evaluated for the potential effects of multicollinearity (i.e., VIF and Tolerance) and suppression, neither of which was observed. Finally, intercorrelations for the variables of interest in the present study were conducted and are presented in Table 1.

Because the sample included participants from both genders, differing educational statuses, and a wide range of ages, the possibility of clustering effects by gender, age, and educational status on the dependent variables, RECC and GCC, existed. A series of one-way multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) revealed no significant differences by gender, Wilks $\Lambda = .986, F(2, 132) = .93, p > .05, \eta_m = .01$, where $\eta_m$ represents the multivariate effect size; age group, Wilks $\Lambda = .995, F(2, 132) = .36, p > .05, \eta_m = .01$; or educational status, Wilks $\Lambda = .993, F(4, 262) = .25, p > .05, \eta_m = .00$, in RECC and GCC. Thus, data were...
aggregated and we did not utilize gender, age, or education status groupings in any further analyses.

**Primary Analyses**

To test our hypothesis that Whites would report more positive perceptions of campus climate (i.e., RECC and GCC) and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment than people of color and to examine potential racial differences in political ideologies (i.e., conservative and liberal), we conducted a one-way MANOVA. These analyses revealed that Whites (n = 80) and people of color (n = 55) did differ across these variables, Wilks $\Lambda = .72$, $F(5, 129) = 10.17, p < .001$, $\eta_m = .28$. Follow-up univariate analyses that racial-ethnic group differences existed in perceptions of RECC, $F(1, 134) = 25.41, p < .001$, $\eta = .16$, where $\eta$ represents the univariate effect size; perceptions of GCC, $F(1, 134) = 6.87, p < .01$, $\eta = .05$; liberal political ideology, $F(1, 134) = 13.82, p < .001$, $\eta = .09$; and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, $F(1, 134) = 13.82, p < .001$, $\eta = .11$; but not in conservative political ideology, $F(1, 134) = 1.63, p > .05$, $\eta = .01$. Overall, these results suggest that Whites (a) reported more positive perceptions of RECC and GCC, (b) endorsed less liberal political ideological beliefs, and (c) cited less experiences of racial-ethnic harassment than people of color. Furthermore, in this sample, Whites and people of color do not differ in their endorsement of conservative ideological beliefs. Means and standard deviations for each of these variables are reported by racial-ethnic group in Table 2.

In examining the extent to which experiences of racial-ethnic harassment and political ideology (i.e., conservative and liberal) predicted perceptions of campus climate (i.e., RECC and GCC), a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted. Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analysis for GCC. To control for racial-ethnic differences in GCC, participants’ racial-ethnic group membership (people of color vs. Whites) was entered in Step 1. Then, experiences of racial-ethnic harassment was entered in Step 2 and political ideology (i.e., conservative and liberal) was entered in Step 3. The cases-to-independent

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**Table 1**

*Intercorrelations Between Demographic, Predictor, and Criterion Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Racial-ethnic group membership</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Conservative ideology</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Liberal ideology</td>
<td>-0.31*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Experiences of racial-ethnic harassment</td>
<td>-0.33*</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. GCC</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.30**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. RECC</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.34**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 135. RECC = Perceptions of Racial-Ethnic Campus Climate. GCC = Perceptions of General Campus Climate. *p < .01.*

**Table 2**

*Means and Standard Deviations for Study Variables by Racial-Ethnic Group Membership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group: Variable</th>
<th>Whites $M$</th>
<th>Whites $SD$</th>
<th>REM $M$</th>
<th>REM $SD$</th>
<th>Total $M$</th>
<th>Total $SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative ideology</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal ideology</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECC</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceptions of General Campus Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adj. $R^2$</th>
<th>Δ$R^2$</th>
<th>ΔF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Race-ethnic group membership</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>2.62*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Race-ethnic group membership</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>-2.91**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiences of racial-ethnic harassment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Race-ethnic group membership</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiences of racial-ethnic harassment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative ideology</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>2.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal ideology</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 135$.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

variable ratio for this analysis was approximately 33 to 1, thus exceeding minimum requirements for regression analyses as set forth by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). In Step 1, racial-ethnic group membership significantly predicted GCC, $F(1, 131) = 6.87, p < .01$, indicating that a significant portion of the variance in perceptions of GCC was accounted for, $R^2 = .05$ (adjusted $R^2 = .04$). After controlling for the effects of racial-ethnic group membership, experiences of racial-ethnic harassment explained an additional significant portion of variance in GCC, $R^2_{change} = .06$, $F_{change}(1,132) = 8.44, p < .01$, with $R^2 = .11$ (adjusted $R^2 = .09$). However, after controlling for the effects of racial-ethnic group membership and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, conservative and liberal political ideology failed to explain an additional significant portion of variance in GCC, $R^2_{change} = .03$. After controlling for the effects of $F_{change}(2, 130) = 2.83, p > .05$, with $R^2 = .14$ (adjusted $R^2 = .11$). In fact, only racial-ethnic group membership ($\beta = .25$) and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment ($\beta = -.36$) remained a significant predictor in Step 3. These findings suggest that racial-ethnic group membership and experiences of harassment, not political ideology, have more influence on perceptions of GCC in that participants who were White and/or experienced less harassment had more positive perceptions of GCC.

Given the results for GCC, it appeared that the effect of racial-ethnic group membership may be mediated by experiences of racial-ethnic harassment. Therefore, post hoc mediational analyses were conducted to test whether experiences of racial-ethnic harassment fully or partially mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of GCC. To test this, we followed the recommendations by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004). First, we regressed perceptions of GCC (the outcome) on racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor). The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B_a = .29, s_a = .11$) associated with the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on GCC (Path c) was significant ($p < .01$). Next, we regressed experiences of racial-ethnic harassment (the mediator) on racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) testing Path a. Again, we found that the unstandardized regression coefficient ($B_a = -.31, s_a = .08$) associated with the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on experiences of racial-ethnic harassment was significant ($p < .001$). Then, we regressed perceptions of GCC on racial-ethnic group membership and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment simultaneously. The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B_a = .36, s_a = .12$) associated with the relation between experiences of racial-ethnic harassment (the mediator) and perceptions of GCC (the outcome) when controlling for racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) was significant, or Path b ($p < .01$). The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B_c = .18, s_c = .11$) associated with racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) and perceptions of GCC (the outcome), or Path c', was not significant ($p < .001$), suggesting a fully mediated relationship. However, 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 equal 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 experiences of racial-ethnic harassment \( B_a = -0.31 \) and the relation between experiences of racial-ethnic harassment and perceptions of GCC when controlling for racial-ethnic group membership \( B_b = -0.36 \) and divided this product by the square root of \( B_a^2 + B_b^2 + s_a^2 s_b^2 \). This equation yielded a significant z-score of 2.32 \( (p < .05) \) suggesting that experiences of racial-ethnic harassment did fully mediate the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of GCC. By dividing the products of \( B_a \) and \( B_b \) by \( B_c \) (the unstandardized regression coefficients), we were able to determine that 37.97\% of the total effect of racial-ethnic group membership on perceptions of GCC is mediated by experiences of racial-ethnic harassment.

We conducted another hierarchical regression analysis with RECC as the dependent variable (see Table 4). We used the same analytical steps in this analysis as with GCC. Again, the cases-to-independent variable ratio for this analysis (33 to 1) exceeds minimum requirements for regression analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). In Step 1, racial-ethnic group membership made a significant contribution to RECC, \( F(1, 133) = 25.41, p < .001 \), indicating that the variance in perceptions of RECC accounted for by racial-ethnic group membership was substantial, \( R^2 = .16 \) (adjusted \( R^2 = .15 \)). After controlling for the effects of racial-ethnic group membership, the experiences of racial-ethnic harassment (Step 2) explained an additional significant portion of variance in RECC, \( R_{change}^2 = .05, F_{change}(1, 132) = 8.37, p < .01 \), with \( R^2 = .21 \) (adjusted \( R^2 = .20 \)). In Step 2, racial-ethnic group membership \( (\beta = .50) \) and experiences with harassment \( (\beta = .50) \) significantly contributed to the variance in RECC. After controlling for both racial-ethnic group membership and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, the third block of predictors (i.e., conservative and liberal political ideology) again explained an additional significant portion of variance in RECC, \( R_{change}^2 = .04, F_{change}(2, 130) = 3.14, p < .05 \), with \( R^2 = .25 \) (adjusted \( R^2 = .22 \)). However, in Step 3, racial-ethnic group membership \( (\beta = -.34) \), conservative political ideology \( (\beta = .19) \), and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment \( (\beta = -.23) \) significantly contributed to the variance in RECC, not liberal political ideology \( (\beta = -.03) \). Taken together, these findings suggest that participants who (a) are White, (b) endorse more conservative political ideological beliefs, and (c) report fewer experiences of racial-ethnic harassment have more positive perceptions of RECC.

Given the results for RECC, it appeared that the effect of racial-ethnic group membership may be partially mediated by conservative

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Note. \( N = 135 \).

* \( p < .05 \).  ** \( p < .01 \).  *** \( p < .001 \).
political ideology and experiences of harassment. Therefore, post hoc mediational analyses were conducted to test whether conservative political ideology and/or experiences of racial-ethnic harassment indeed mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of RECC. Again, we followed the recommendations by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004). We first examined whether conservative political ideology was a mediator. Thus, we regressed perceptions of RECC (the outcome) on racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor). The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B_c = -.62, s_c = .12$) associated with the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on RECC (Path c) was significant ($p < .001$). We then regressed conservative ideology (the mediator) on racial-group group membership (the predictor), or path b. This relationship ($B_b = -.13, s_b = .10$) was not significant ruling out conservative ideology as mediator between racial-ethnic group membership and RECC.

Next, we tested whether experiences of racial-ethnic harassment mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of RECC. Thus, the first step was the same as with conservative ideology in that the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on RECC (Path c) was significant ($\hat{\beta}_c = .62, s_c = .12, p < .001$). The second step was the same as in the GCC mediation analyses where the effect of racial-ethnic group membership on experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, or Path a, was significant ($\hat{\beta}_a = -.31, s_a = .08, p < .001$). Next, we regressed perceptions of RECC on racial-ethnic group membership and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment simultaneously. The unstandardized regression coefficient ($\hat{\beta}_b = -.40, s_b = .14$) associated with the relation between experiences of racial-ethnic harassment (the mediator) and RECC (the outcome) when controlling for racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) was significant, or Path b ($p < .01$). However, the unstandardized regression coefficient ($\hat{\beta}_c = .49, s_c = .13$) associated with racial-ethnic group membership (the predictor) and RECC (the outcome), or Path c, was significant ($p < .001$), suggesting that experiences of racial-ethnic harassment partially mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and RECC. Therefore, we needed to test whether a mediation effect truly existed and again used Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger’s (1998) method. Kenny and colleagues’ equations yielded a significant z-score of 2.31 ($p < .05$) and determined that 19.63% of the total effect of racial-ethnic group membership on perceptions of RECC is mediated by experiences of harassment, respectively.

Discussion

The present study is the first to explicitly examine the relations among racial-ethnic group membership, political ideology (i.e., conservative and liberal), and perceptions of campus climate (i.e., GCC and RECC). It was our intention to (a) replicate previous research findings that suggest Whites experience less racial-ethnic harassment and perceive campus climate more positively than their racial-ethnic peers, (b) provide more information on potential racial-ethnic group differences in the endorsement of conservative and/or liberal political ideological beliefs, (c) examine the degree to which perceptions of campus climate where predicted by political ideology and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, and (d) illuminate whether political ideology and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of campus climate. Hence, this research both replicates and extends the campus climate research by examining simple demographic differences in perceptions of campus climate, experiences of harassment, and political ideology as well as examining personal and attitudinal influences on perceptions of GCC and RECC.

The current study’s findings supported our first hypothesis as well as replicated the findings of previous research in that Whites endorsed more positive perceptions of campus climate (e.g., Ancis et al., 2000; Gloria et al., 2001; Johnson, 2003; Pfeifer & Schnieder, 1974; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) and reported fewer experiences of racial-ethnic harassment (e.g., Hurtado, 1992; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) than their racial-ethnic peers. In the current study, Whites also endorsed less liberal political ideological beliefs than people of color. This finding is supported by previous research suggesting that students of color hold more liberal beliefs, particularly when related to programs and policies intended
to address racial discrimination (Ancis et al., 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Somewhat surprisingly, Whites and persons of color did not differ on their endorsement of conservative political ideology beliefs. At the same time, this finding supports Kerlinger’s (1970) argument that liberal and conservative political ideologies are independent factors rather than opposite ends of a single continuum. Furthermore, consistent with Dey and Hurtado’s (2005) findings that over the last 30 years fewer college students identified as strong liberals or conservatives and thus are moving to the political center (e.g., hold more moderate political views), Whites and persons of color in the present study endorse moderate levels of conservative ($M = 3.21, M = 3.34$) and liberal ($M = 3.47, M = 3.86$) political ideology beliefs, respectively. Given the current state of U.S. racial-ethnic politics and climate, it would behoove researchers to further investigate racial-ethnic differences in political ideology when examining perceptions of campus climate.

Along with replicating and supporting previous research and theory, the present study advanced campus climate research by examining the influence of attitudinal and personal factors on perceptions of campus climate. On the one hand, after controlling racial-ethnic group membership, results showed experiences of racial-ethnic harassment predicted both perceptions of GCC and RECC, whereas conservative ideology only predicted perceptions of RECC and liberal political ideology did not significantly predict either GCC or RECC. Specifically, those who experienced racial-ethnic harassment reported less positive perceptions of GCC and RECC, whereas those who endorsed more conservative political ideology reported more positive perceptions of RECC. Neither of these findings is all that surprising. On the other hand, the nonsignificant findings related to both conservative and liberal political ideology were unanticipated. Specifically, based on the arguments of notable conservative pundits and organizations (e.g., ACTA, 2005; Baurelin, 2006; D’Souza, 1998, 2002; Gravois, 2007; Will, 2007) suggesting that academia is fraught with liberal bias and GCC’s representation of more personal experiences of campus climate, we assumed conservative ideology would be associated with more negative perceptions of GCC, whereas liberal ideology would be associated with more positive perceptions of GCC and more negative perceptions of RECC. Instead, no liberal bias was detected in perceptions of GCC or RECC. However, a conservative bias in perceptions of RECC emerged. Given this is the first study to explicitly examine the relations among political ideology and perceptions of campus climate, future studies are needed to replicate our results.

The present study further advanced campus climate research by examining the potential mediating roles of conservative ideology and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment in the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of campus climate. These post hoc tests illuminated the complexity of perceptions of campus climate, particularly given that only experiences of racial-ethnic harassment (not conservative ideology) fully mediated GCC, but only partially mediated RECC. These findings suggest the reason persons of color report more negative perceptions of GCC than Whites is because they are experiencing more racial-ethnic harassment. Without the experiences of harassment, people of color would perceive the climate very similarly to Whites. Furthermore, given the lack of significant association to emerge between political ideology and GCC (i.e., conservative = −.00 and liberal = .14), it does not hold that racial-ethnic differences in perceptions of GCC are due to liberal or personal bias and/or hypersensitivity as implied by ACTA (2005) and Will (2007). Instead, when people personally experience harassment, they would report more negative personal perceptions of campus climate (i.e., GCC) regardless of racial-ethnic group membership. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that due to the structure of the U.S. society, people of color experience more racial-ethnic harassment and thus are more likely to report more negative perceptions of GCC. It also is noteworthy that while our hypotheses that experiences of racial-ethnic harassment would be a stronger mediator than political ideology for both GCC and RECC was supported, we found that experiences of racial-ethnic harassment only partially mediated the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of RECC. While these findings also suggest that the reasons people of color report more negative perceptions of RECC is
due to experience of racial-ethnic harassment, this is not the only reason racial-ethnic differences exist in perceptions of RECC. In fact, Worthington et al. (2008) also found that color-blind racial attitudes (COBRA) also mediated the aforementioned relationship. Thus, it is important for future research to address the following questions: (a) Would the combination of COBRA and racial-ethnic harassment experiences fully mediate the relationship between racial-ethnic group membership and perceptions of RECC, (b) Are there other variables that account for the variance in RECC relative to racial-ethnic group membership, and (c) Will racial group membership always explain some of the variance in RECC, and if so, why?

In light of the current study's findings, it is important for higher education administrators, faculty, and staff to refrain from simply addressing differences in perceptions of campus climate (i.e., GCC and RECC) by race. While racial-ethnic differences in perceptions of GCC and RECC are a reality, the role of experiences of harassment and conservative political ideology in these perceptions cannot be ignored. This information should be used to refute and avoid racial-ethnic and cultural uniformity myths and assumptions that may negatively impact their attempts to improve campus climate, particularly given the increasing racial-ethnic diversity on university and college campuses (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998; Worthington et al., 2008). Instead, higher education leaders should develop policies, strategies, and programs that address experiences of racial-ethnic harassment explicitly. For example, does the institution have a plan for supporting the victim of racial-ethnic harassment, to intervene in the behavior and attitudes of the perpetrator, and to attend to the reactions of greater campus community? Moreover, these same leaders should be aware of how conservative political ideology influences individuals' perceptions and beliefs related to such policies, strategies, and programs directed at improving campus climate. This awareness should lead to tactful approaches to address the concerns of those who hold conservative views so that their voices are heard and not dismissed—a concern raised by Ehrlich and Colby (2004).

Similar to other research that investigates factors influencing perceptions of campus climate, the present study also has some clear limitations. It is important to acknowledge several threats to the internal, external, and construct validity of our study. First, several systematic procedures affected the sample composition. We purposefully oversampled college students who belonged to racial-ethnic minority groups in hopes of making more reliable comparisons with White college students in terms of perceptions of campus climate (i.e., RECC and GCC) and any mediating factors (i.e., political ideology and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment) in the relationship between racial ethnic group membership and perceptions of campus climate. While such reliable comparisons are important in psychological research, this oversampling procedure resulted in significantly more racial-ethnic minority members than in the general U.S. population as well as in the population of the participating university, which may have skewed the results. The other systematic sampling procedure that may have affected the sample composition is self-selection bias. That is, it is possible that only college students who were interested participated in the present study. Thus, self-selection may lead to great differences between those who participated in the study and those who do not, again leading to skewed results. However, in the end, we do not know if or how these two systematic sampling procedures truly affected the results of the present study.

Along with systematic sampling influences, attrition also may have been a threat to internal validity in the present study. Twenty-one participants did not fully complete the survey and were not included in the data analysis. Thus, there is a concern that the responses of the participants who were included in the present study made not adequately represent those that dropped out (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). However, the participants who did not complete the survey only comprised approximately 13% of the total sample.

In terms of external validity, the present study was conducted at only one large, predominately White research university in the Midwest. Thus, the generalizability of the findings may be in question. For example, it may not be appropriate to generalize the findings to universities in the South, West, Southwest, and Eastern U.S. It also may be inappropriate to generalize findings to students attending universities with different missions, student enrollments,
racial histories, and/or racial compositions (e.g., Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges, Historically Black Institutions). More research is needed that represent different populations before we will know how far these results can be generalized.

Mono-method bias is a limitation due to the use of single self-report measures to operationalize the constructs (i.e., RECC, GCC, political ideology) of this study. Specifically, mono-method bias may result in inadequate construct validity and small effects (Heppner et al., 2008). It may be prudent that future researchers use multiple measures to define political ideology, experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, and perceptions of campus climate (i.e., RECC and GCC).

Finally, our ability to determine causal influences and ordering of relationships in the mediation model was limited due to the present study’s correlational design. While we would not want to conduct true experiments that influence students’ political ideology or experiences of racial-ethnic harassment, it is important for researchers to conduct prospective longitudinal research studies to determine the order of relationships. For example, does experience of harassment truly mediate the relationship between racial ethnic-group membership and perceptions of campus climate or does racial-ethnic group membership moderate the relationship between experience of racial-ethnic harassment and perceptions of campus climate?

Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitations, the many strengths of the present study firmly support its findings. The new insights about racial-ethnic group differences in liberal political ideology and experiences of racial-ethnic harassment as well as in perceptions of campus climate due to experiences of racial-ethnic harassment warrant the attention of educators and policymakers. Diversity-related programs and policies should take these findings into consideration to enhance the learning experiences of all students, particularly those from racial-ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, when conducting such programs and developing and/or implementing such policies, educators and policymakers should use these findings to respond appropriately when racial-ethnic harassment arises intentionally or unintentionally.

References


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