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## **Epistemologies of Ignorance: Revisiting the Marley Hypothesis and the Role of Collective Self-Esteem and Social Dominance Theory**

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**Abstract:** *Background:* In studies on racial differences in the perception of racism, it has been shown that these differences are mediated by the degree of historical knowledge about racism. The validity of this hypothesis is evaluated in the context of the states of Oregon and Washington. In the present study, we propose as the main objective to contrast the Marley hypothesis based on its previous empirical evaluation, as it has been substantiated, and incorporating the analysis of the construct of social dominance orientation (SDO). *Methodology:* Using convenience sampling, 79 White Americans ( $M = 35.75$ ,  $SD = 16.45$ ) and 58 Black Americans ( $M = 30.93$ ,  $SD = 10.27$ ) were selected. Four measures were used: a historical knowledge quiz, the *Collective Self-Esteem Scale*, a perception of racism scale and the *SDO-7 Short Scale*. *Results:* The expected racial differences in the perception of racism were not found. However, White participants presented less historical knowledge. Furthermore, greater historical knowledge predicted SDO only for Black participants. It has been proven that the degree of racial identification moderates the effect of race status on perceptions of racism. *Discussion and Conclusion:* The defense of a “non-racist” self-image by white participants is closely linked to how they report their perceptions of racism. It is noted that, even though the two groups presented equal levels in this variable, the scores could be due to different underlying processes, hence the results are compatible with the notion that the two groups understand racism in different ways. The data suggests that in this region, the

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perception and understanding of racism are influenced by sociocultural factors that were not as relevant in previous studies.

**Key Words:** Marley hypothesis, collective self-esteem, social dominance orientation, prejudice, perceptions of racism, ignorance.

## **Epistemologías de la Ignorancia: Una revisión de la Hipótesis Marley y el papel de la Autoestima Colectiva y la Teoría de la Dominancia Social**

**Resumen:** *Antecedentes:* En estudios previos sobre diferencias raciales en la percepción del racismo, se ha demostrado que estas diferencias están mediadas por el grado de conocimiento histórico sobre el racismo. La validez de esta hipótesis se evalúa en el contexto de los estados de Oregon y Washington. En el presente estudio nos proponemos como objetivo principal contrastar la hipótesis de Marley a partir de su evaluación empírica previa, tal como ha sido fundamentada, e incorporando el análisis del constructo de orientación a la dominancia social (ODS). *Método:* Mediante muestreo por conveniencia, se seleccionaron 79 estadounidenses blancos ( $M = 35,75$ ,  $SD = 16,45$ ) y 58 estadounidenses negros ( $M = 30,93$ ,  $SD = 10,27$ ). Se utilizaron cuatro medidas: un cuestionario de conocimientos históricos, la Escala de Autoestima Colectiva, una escala de percepción de racismo y la Escala Corta SDO-7. *Resultados:* No se encontraron las diferencias raciales esperadas en la percepción del racismo. Sin embargo, los participantes blancos presentaron menos conocimiento histórico. Además, un mayor conocimiento histórico predijo la orientación a la dominancia social sólo para los participantes negros. Se ha demostrado que el grado de identificación racial modera el efecto del estatus racial en las percepciones de racismo. *Discusión y conclusión:* La defensa de una autoimagen “no racista” por parte de los participantes blancos está estrechamente relacionada con la forma en que informan sobre sus percepciones del racismo. Se observa que, si bien ambos grupos presentaron niveles similares en esta variable, los puntajes podrían deberse a procesos subyacentes diferentes, por lo que los resultados son compatibles con la noción de que los dos grupos entienden el racismo de distinta manera. Los datos sugieren que en esta zona, la percepción y comprensión del racismo están influenciadas por factores socioculturales que no fueron tan relevantes en estudios anteriores.

**Palabras clave:** Hipótesis de Marley, autoestima colectiva, orientación al dominio social, prejuicios, percepciones de racismo, ignorancia.

## 1. Introduction

### *Epistemologies of ignorance: applications*

Racism has traditionally been conceptualized by linking it to a series of related psychological processes, such as discrimination or false generalizations. However, in recent years, this focus has shifted towards the sociocultural and structural features (Adams et al., 2008, 2010; Bonam et al., 2017; Salter & Adams, 2013). Individualist ideology, characteristic of North American and European culture, has influenced both academic and lay conceptions of racism (Salter et al., 2016, 2018; Sommers & Norton, 2006). This approach to the race problem circumscribes the point of intervention to the individual, sidelining other factors and interpretations that aren't recognized on the plane of psychological processes (Teo, 2011). Considering the shortfalls of this tendency, Salter and Adams (2019) have insisted on the necessity of a theoretical framework oriented towards the explanation of the cultural, institutional and systemic processes that contribute to the reproduction of racism, and which surpasses the mere analysis of the psychological processes which underlie individual acts of racism. With the purpose of providing a counter-narrative, Salter et al. (2018) have developed an approach centered on *epistemologies of ignorance*, the cultural-psychological tools which facilitate denial and inaction in the face of racism.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to analyze these tools which legitimate intergroup differences in the perception of racism, mediated by critical historical knowledge, and to relate these tools to a subsequent analysis of the construct of social dominance orientation (SDO).

### 1. Theoretical framework

#### *Racial differences in racism: the Marley hypothesis*

The individualist ideology which permeates both lay and academic understandings of behavior (Sommers & Norton, 2006) has facilitated a perspective in which racism is conceptualized by linking it to related psychological processes, such as bias or discrimination. Perspectives which prioritize the role of individual processes harbor

social and political implications that attribute the driving force of racism to “guilty agents” (Salter & Adams, 2016). Along these lines, tendencies which are encompassed in the *prejudice problematic* are conducive to methodologies which serve to identify biased or racist individuals. When these critiques are considered from the *epistemologies of ignorance* perspective, one can emphasize the context-specific ways that different social groups come to understand racial hierarchy. Said epistemologies of ignorance are employed by far-right political parties, according to Mondon (2023), as they tend to use euphemistic terminology and to avoid systemic or structural understandings of oppression when dealing with racism and white supremacy. A similar conscious ignorance is to be found in white university students who deny the most pernicious manifestations of oppression (De Saxw & Ker, 2023).

### *Racial differences in racism and social dominance orientation (SDO)*

A case study in this regard is social dominance theory (SDO), which is presented as the degree of individual preference or support for group based social hierarchy (Ho et al., 2015). The construct is widely used, both as a predictor of attitudes related to social inequality, and as a psychological disposition that fuels inter group conflicts (Visintin et al., 2019) and determines the actions of individuals towards other groups (Sidanius et al., 2017). At present, it is recognized that SDO contains two distinct subdimensions: SDO-Dominance (the preference for open and forced oppression) and SDO-Anti Egalitarianism (the preference for social hierarchies maintained by the subtle effects of ideology and social policies). The construct has been the object of numerous critiques on behalf of those who consider that, instead of representing a universal orientation towards inequality, SDO would be more adequately interpreted as a reflection of identity-based processes and specific group interests (Pehrson et al., 2017; Pratto et al., 2006).

Within psychology not all proposed analyses are centered on the study of individual differences such the aforementioned social dominance orientation construct, as theories have also been forwarded which relate to social identity, intergroup relations and auto-categorization of the self (see Turner, 1999) and their links to perceptions of racism. Rooted in a critical perspective, Durrheim (2024) has made reference to the paradox of the self-representations of psychology as a liberal discipline and the lack of conversation which steers attention away from contexts of systemic racism and towards the workings of mechanisms of power and social control. It so occurs that the positive distinctive character of the endo-group becomes a source of self-esteem. Accordingly, authors such

as Rivera, Vu and Backstrom (2024) have shown that this variable is differentially related to intra and exo-group evaluations. Meanwhile, mechanisms of delegitimation and exclusion of the other have also been studied in their relationship to the dehumanization of particular groups, thus according to Rodríguez-Pérez (2007), dehumanization consists in the tendency to deny people their condition as a human being and to assign them an identity without value (Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2011). Furthermore, the stigmatized group itself can internalize these processes of infra-valorization as the basis of racial prejudice (Gómez-Martínez & Moral-Jiménez, 2018).

The act of conceptualizing racism as a social product, which deserves to be studied in its own right (Mueller, 2020), encourages a closer examination of the different racialized ways of knowing about, and perceiving, racism. In this way, the denial of racism and different representations of history constitute cultural products which are inextricably linked to the justification of social inequality and of the various notions of inferiority and superiority which are assigned to social groups (Salter et al., 2018). For example, ignorance regarding the history of subordinated groups promotes an understanding of hierarchy that situates the causes of inter group differences in innate attributes and qualities. Similarly related to justifications of social inequality, SDO is presented as a construct that predicts the adherence to *hierarchy-legitimizing myths* (Sidanius et al., 2017). Of course, social dominance theorists recognize the influence of some contextual factors, however, the task of explaining the social reproduction and learning of these myths has received scant attention. In the present study, we suggest that said myths are linked to historical representations of social hierarchy and we stress the utility of this perspective in examining the role of education, both formal and informal, in their reproduction.

Another application of the *epistemologies of ignorance* perspective has been in the reinterpretation of the tendency, on behalf of Black Americans, to perceive more racism (Pew Research Center, 2016), and to understand racism in a more systemic manner, than their white counterparts (Sommers & Norton, 2006). In this regard, Heikes (2023) alludes to exculpatory means of having undesirable beliefs founded in socially constructed ignorance and calls for epistemic responsibility. In many cases, the Eurocentric standard commonly adopted in the field of psychology tends to encourage explanations of other groups in which their behavior is implicitly framed as a deviation from a natural baseline. From this viewpoint, the perceptions of Black Americans are conceptualized as an anomaly deserving of further study (Gilbert & Rossing, 2013). In this context, Nelson et al. (2013) have formulated the *Marley hypothesis*, which proposes

that racial differences in the perception of racism are mediated by *critical historical knowledge*, a term which references an individual's degree of knowledge regarding the history of racism in North America. The mentioned authors deploy a signal detection paradigm in order to conceptualize historical knowledge as “*reality attunement*” (Bonam et al., 2019). The act of rooting explanations of the perception of racism in representations of history, as is done within the framework of the Marley hypothesis, highlights how individuals come from cultural worlds which facilitate and promote context-specific ways of knowing and perceiving (Salter et al., 2018). The tendency to mitigate moral guilt in the United States amongst those who are socialized in a culture of afro-skepticism is referred to by Fraser-Burgess (2023) as hermeneutic injustice.

The Marley hypothesis approach, developed exclusively in the work of Salter (2021), has been of considerable theoretical relevance (Coleman et al., 2020). In spite of this, relatively little quantitative data exists on this hypothesis, as it has only been empirically evaluated on three occasions. Each study has been carried out in a different cultural context, each one producing noteworthy variations in the results (Bonam et al., 2019; Strickhouser et al., 2019). In this respect, the discrepancies in the results have been interpreted by virtue of the assumption that racial differences tend to decrease as the sociodemographic balance, between White and Black Americans, of the target populations increases. When considered in chronological order, the demographics of the respective target populations of the previous studies has become progressively more diverse. This tendency is significant because in the successive replications, the gap between White and Black participants has diminished in the variables pertaining to racism perceptions and historical knowledge (Bonam et al., 2019). In fact, in the most recent study conducted by Strickhouser et al. (2019), the variable *race* was not a significant predictor of critical historical knowledge of racism. As a result of this, and in contrast to the two previous studies, the Marley hypothesis could not be corroborated.

### *Objetives and hypothesis*

In the present study our main objective is to test the Marley hypothesis in conformity with the existing empirical evaluations (Strickhouser et al., 2019), and to incorporate the analysis of social dominance orientation (SDO). The conditions under which this study is conducted theoretically maximize differences between White and Black Americans (Capozza et al., 2017) and as such, we anticipate that the hypothesis will replicate. Specifically, the following hypotheses were formulated: *H1*) White participants will both

perceive less racism and show less historical knowledge than Black participants, and that this tendency will be stronger for perceptions of systemic racism. *H2*) Racial differences in the perception of racism will be statistically mediated by historical knowledge when controlling for the effect of racial identity relevance. *H3*) Racial identity relevance will predict racism perceptions and that both factors will be positively associated in the case of Black participants and negatively associated for White participants. *H4*) Historical knowledge will be negatively associated with SDO and that this tendency will be stronger for the subdimension SDO-Dominance. *H5*) SDO will be negatively associated with racism perceptions and that this tendency will be stronger for perceptions of systemic racism and, lastly, *H6*) SDO will positively correlate with racial identity relevance for White participants and negatively for Black participants and, that White participants will show higher levels of SDO.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The demographic properties of the samples constitute the primary factor drawn upon in previous studies to explain the discrepancies between the successive empirical evaluations of the *Marley hypothesis* (Bonam et al., 2019). In the current study the participants were selected through nonprobability sampling which took place in the states of Oregon and Washington, in the American Northwest. In both states, Black residents comprise approximately 3% of the population, while Whites represent 80% (Oregon Health Authority, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2019), with said proportion remaining stable amongst university populations (Univstats, 2021; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2013). The low proportion of Black students in the region encumbered the recruitment of this population, and for this reason, as many participants as possible were accepted who had been enrolled in college at some moment in their lives. Initially, a total of 191 people participated in the study. We eliminated all participants who: *a*) did not self-identify as Black or White, *b*) reported having consulted third parties or the internet during the completion of the questionnaire, *c*) were not residents of Oregon or Washington and *d*) had never attended college. Once the criteria of inclusion and exclusion had been applied, the sample was reduced to 135 participants, who ranged from 19 to 79 years of age ( $M = 33.71$ ,  $SD = 14.32$ ). The sample was composed of 79 White participants (43 women, 27 men, 2 non-binary) ( $M = 35.75$ ,  $SD = 16.45$ ) and 58 Black participants (31 women, 25 men, 2 non-binary) ( $M = 30.93$ ,  $SD = 10.27$ ).

### **3.2. Instruments**

#### *Historical knowledge*

First, the historical knowledge quiz developed by Nelson et al. (2013) was used to evaluate participants' historical knowledge of racism. The response options were *True* or *False* and the quiz consisted of 11 true statements and 5 false statements pertaining to Black history in the United States (e.g. “*Medgar Evers struggled for the civil rights of Black Americans and was assassinated for his writings*”). The participants indicated if each item was true or false and reported their degree of certainty on a scale of 1 (*guessing*) to 5 (*certain*).

#### *Collective Self-Esteem and racial identity relevance*

With the goal of measuring the degree to which participants identified with their respective racial groups, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with the four items ( $\alpha = .91$ ) of the Private Collective Self-Esteem subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSE; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; S1  $\alpha = .74$ , S2  $\alpha = .80$ , S3  $\alpha = .71$ ; values obtained in this study .71, .77 and .70, respectively). In accordance with Nelson et al. (2013), the items were adapted to reference racial identity (e.g. “*I feel good about other members of my racial group*”).

#### *Perceptions of racism*

Racism perceptions were measured using the two scales elaborated by Nelson et al. (2013) in which the participants indicated their degree of certainty, from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*certainly*) regarding the existence of racism in a series of real and hypothetical cases (e.g. “*The portrayal of African Americans in US entertainment media*”). The first five items correspond to isolated incidents of racism ( $\alpha = .71$ ) and the remaining nine refer to systemic manifestations of racism ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

#### *Social dominance orientation*

Lastly, the participants completed the SDO-7 Short Scale, developed by Ho et al. (2015; S1  $\alpha = .87$ , S2  $\alpha = .88$ , S3  $\alpha = .90$ ) in which they indicated the degree to which they agreed, from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 7 (*strongly favor*) with a series of 8 statements (e.g. “*No one group should dominate in society*”). The first half of the items measure the subdimension *dominance* (SDO-D) and the other half corresponds to the subdimension *anti-egalitarianism* (SDO-E).



### **3.3. Procedure**

The questionnaire was administered online and the participants confirmed that they were legal adults and read a statement in which the purpose and nature of the study were concisely explained to them. This statement also guaranteed the privacy and confidentiality of the participants' data and, in order to initiate the questionnaire, it was necessary for the participants to accept said conditions. With the exception of the addition of social dominance orientation as an added variable, the same measures, scales and analysis were used as in previous research (Nelson et al., 2013). It is relevant to note that in past studies on the *Marley hypothesis*, in which online and in-person procedures have been compared to each other, there were no significant differences between the two modalities (Strickhouser et al., 2019). The selection of the participants was guided through nonprobability, intentional sampling oriented towards the university population of the states of Oregon and Washington. The questionnaire was distributed through a URL link with the collaboration of various professors at Portland State University (PSU), which in turn forwarded the link to university students and graduates in the preestablished region. In order to commence this collaborative process with PSU faculty, the university required that a proposal of the study be approved by their Institutional Review Board.

### **3.4. Design and Data Analysis**

An ex post-facto design was utilized. The nature of the study was descriptive, correlational and cross-sectional.

The data analysis was completed with SPSS 27 and, in various of the analyses, the use of SPSS PROCESS 3.5.3 (Hayes, 2017) was also required. Before beginning each analysis, it was verified that the data was compliant with the relevant parametric assumptions. Regarding the calculation of the degree of historical knowledge, the same signal detection approach used in previous studies was followed (Strickhouser et al., 2019). The hit rate was calculated as the percentage of true items that were answered correctly and the false alarm rate corresponded to false items answered incorrectly (Stanislaw and Todorov, 1999). The sensitivity index was computed as the difference between the standard scores of the hit and false alarm rates, through the following formula:  $d' = Z(\text{hit rate}) - Z(\text{false alarm rate})$ . The other variables (CSE, perception of racism, and SDO) were calculated as the mean score per item.

In the context of the analyses relative to the Marley hypothesis, and in order to determine if racial difference existed in the perception of racism, mixed-model analyses of variance (ANOVA) were carried out. In order to determine if differences existed between both types of racism perception for a specific racial group, and in the comparison of historical knowledge between racial groups, *t* tests for independent samples were conducted.

The same mediation model executed in previous studies was used with the purpose of determining if the hypothesized racial differences in the perception of racism were statistically mediated by historical knowledge (the *Marley hypothesis*) (Nelson et al., 2013). With this objective, the Model 5 of SPSS PROCESS with 10,000 bootstrap samples was utilized. The model tests the indirect effect of the category *race* (through historical knowledge) on racism perceptions, controlling for the effects of both CSE and the interaction *CSE $\times$ Race*. This mediation model was also used to explore the effect of CSE on racism perceptions and to test if the effects of CSE and historical knowledge were independent, as has been found in previous studies (Bonam et al., 2019). To further examine the effects of the interaction *CSE $\times$ Race* on racism perceptions, the Johnson-Neyman technique (Hayes & Montoya, 2013) was employed with Model 1 of SPSS PROCESS.

The relationships between social dominance orientation and the variables pertaining to the Marley hypothesis were explored through bivariate correlations. In the case of the relationship between SDO and historical knowledge, additional explorations were carried out via multiple linear regressions with the goal of establishing if both subcomponents of historical knowledge (the hit and false alarm rates) contributed to the changes in SDO to the same degree. Finally, independent sample *t* tests were utilized to compare levels of SDO between racial groups.

#### **4. Results**

With the aim of examining intergroup differences in racism perceptions (H1), we conducted a mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA) in which the category *race* constituted the between-subjects factor and racism perceptions (isolated, systemic) constituted the within-subjects factor. The main effect of the condition *race* was not significant,  $F(1,135) = 0.35, p = .557, \eta_p^2 = .003$ . Significant racial differences were not found for systemic manifestations,  $F(1,136) = 2.28, p = .133, \eta_p^2 = .017$ , nor in the case of isolated events,  $F(1,136) = 0.24, p = .627, \eta_p^2 = .003$ . Neither was a significant main effect

found for racism type (isolated, systemic)  $F(1,135) = 0.22$ ,  $p = .639$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .002$ . Nonetheless, a significant interaction emerged between the condition *race* and racism type,  $F(1,135) = 4.00$ ,  $p = .048$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .029$ . Independent sample  $t$  tests revealed that for Black participants, there were no differences between the two types of racism perceptions,  $t(57) = -0.93$ ,  $p = .355$ ,  $d = 0.13$ . However, White participants perceived significantly less racism for systemic manifestations in comparison with isolated events  $t(78) = 2.03$ ,  $p = .046$ ,  $d = 0.21$ .

As in previous studies, signal detection theory was employed in the interpretation of the data relative to historical knowledge. Statistically significant differences were identified in the false alarm rates, which were higher for White participants, nevertheless, significant between-group differences were not detected in the hit rates. Once the discriminability index ( $d'$ ) was calculated, it was confirmed that this variable was significantly higher for Black participants (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Group means and differences for the main variables

Measure	Black Americans  <i>n</i> = 58	White Americans  <i>n</i> = 79	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
PR: isolated	6.34 (.67)	6.40 (.59)	.49	0.10
PR: systemic	6.43 (.55)	6.26 (.67)	-1.51	0.28
HK: hit rate	.96 (.05)	.94 (.08)	-1.01	0.30
HK: false alarm rate	.28 (.22)	.38 (.25)	2.51*	0.42
HK: reality attunement ( $d'$ )	2.14 (.68)	1.80 (.62)	-2.96**	0.52
Racial identity relevance	6.13 (.83)	3.67 (1.21)	-13.36***	2.51

Source: Own elaboration

Note PR = perceptions of racism, HK = historical knowledge. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

In previous studies, the Marley hypothesis has been assessed using a mediation model in which it is hypothesized that racial differences in historical knowledge are mediating the gap between Whites and Blacks in the perception of racism. In conformity with Pardo and Román (2013), one of the necessary conditions of this model is the existence of a statistically significant relationship between the independent variable (*race*) and the dependent variable (*perceptions of racism*) (H2). The first ANOVA executed here showed that this condition was not met insofar as significant racial differences were nonexistent in the perception of racism. Notwithstanding, we have carried out the mediation analysis with the goal of examining the hypothesized effect of racial identity relevance. As in previous studies, this analysis required the use of the Model 5 of SPSS

PROCESS Macro 3.5 (Hayes, 2018) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. In this analysis, two hypotheses were tested: (1) the variable *race* will have an indirect effect on racism perceptions, through historical knowledge (*d'*), when the effect of CSE and its interaction with the variable *race* are controlled for and (2) the variable CSE will have a moderating effect on the direct effect of the variable *race* on racism perceptions (controlling for the effect of historical knowledge). For this purpose, two separate mediation analyses were effectuated in which the respective dependent variables were the two types of racism perceptions. In accordance with the mentioned noncompliance of the data with the first condition of the model, the indirect effect of the category *race*, through historical knowledge, on racism perceptions was not significant for isolated incidents of racism,  $\beta = .0004$ ,  $SE = .01$ , 95% CI = [-.022, .020], or for systemic manifestations,  $\beta = .01$ ,  $SE = .009$ , 95% CI = [-.003, .033], and as such, the Marley hypothesis failed to replicate. The multiple linear regressions provided by the model also revealed that, when the effects of racial identity were controlled for, historical knowledge did not predict racism perceptions. This held both for perceptions of isolated incidents,  $\beta = -.003$ ,  $p = .964$ , 95% CI = [-.17, .16], and for those of systemic manifestations,  $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p = .175$ , 95% CI = [-.26, .05]. Additional explorations of the relationship between historical knowledge and perceptions of racism were conducted utilizing Spearman's correlation coefficient. It was found that there was a statistically significant negative association between both factors in the case of systemic manifestations,  $rs(135) = -.19$ ,  $p = .030$ , but not in the case of isolated events,  $rs(135) = -.06$ ,  $p = .488$  (see Table 2). Upon analyzing the values obtained through bivariate correlations of each racial group separately, it was ascertained that this association was only significant in the case of Black participants (see Table 3).

**Table 2.** *Correlations (rs) between main variables (N = 137)*

Measure	PR: isolated	PR: systemic	Racial identity relevance
Historical knowledge ( <i>d'</i> )	-.06	-.19*	.20*
PR: isolated	--	.55**	-.17*
PR: systemic		--	.05

Source: Own elaboration. Note: PR = perceptions of racism, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 3.** Correlations (*rs*) between main variables for each subpopulation

Measure	1	2	3	4
Historical knowledge ( <i>d'</i> )	--	-.004	-.19	-.27*
PR: isolated	-.05	--	.57**	-.03
PR: systemic	-.22*	.55**	--	.38**
Racial identity relevance	.15	-.35**	-.29**	--

Source: Own elaboration. Note: PR = perceptions of racism, above diagonal: Black Americans  $n = 58$ , below diagonal: White Americans  $n = 79$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Independent sample *t* tests were used to compare levels of racial identity relevance between racial groups (H3). It was significantly higher for Black Americans,  $t(133.23) = -14.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 2.51$ . The relationship between CSE and racism perceptions was explored through the multiple linear regressions already provided by the mediation analysis executed with Model 5 of PROCESS (see Hayes, 2018). These analyses indicate that perceptions of systemic manifestations of racism were predicted by both CSE,  $\beta = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.36, .99], and the interaction  $CSE \times Race$ ,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [-.24, -.09]. In the case of isolated incidents of racism, neither said interaction,  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .215$ , 95% CI = [-.12, .03], nor CSE,  $\beta = .10$ ,  $p = .558$ , 95% CI = [-.24, .44], were significant predictors in the model. The Johnson-Neyman technique (Hayes & Montoya, 2013) was used with Model 1 of PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) to examine this direct moderation effect. As predicted, these analyses revealed that Black participants perceived significantly more racism for systemic manifestations than White participants at or above the 5.66 level of racial identity relevance, with 36% of the participants' average CSE response falling above this point and within the region of significance. At or below the 4.35 CSE level, White participants perceived significantly more racism than their Black counterparts, with 46% of the subjects falling below this point. This trend adopted the anticipated direction; low levels of racial identity relevance were associated with greater racism perceptions (systemic type) for White participants, while high levels of racial identity relevance were associated with greater racism perceptions for Black participants.

In the analysis pertaining to social dominance theory, Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between SDO, historical knowledge (*d'*), racism perceptions and racial identity (H4). In order to explore racial group-specific tendencies, the bivariate correlations of both the entire sample (see Table 4), and of each group separately (see Table 5), were analyzed. Analyses of the whole sample revealed that *d'* and SDO scores were not significantly associated. In contrast, when the Black participants were analyzed separately, a negative association between *d'* and SDO-D was

found,  $rs(56) = -.36, p = .005$ . The association between SDO-E and  $d'$  was also in the anticipated direction, but was not statistically significant. Conversely, upon examining the White participant's correlations, a positive association was found between  $d'$  and SDO-D,  $rs(77) = .30, p = .008$ , which was not significant in the case of SDO-E.

**Table 4.** Correlations ( $rs$ ) between SDO and main variables ( $N = 137$ )

Measure	SDO-E	PR Historical knowledge ( $d'$ )	PR: isolated	PR: systemic	Racial identity relevance
SDO-D	.21*	.04	-.17*	-.31**	.19*
SDO-E	--	.05	-.12	-	.24**
PR: Historical knowledge ( $d'$ )		--	-.06	-.19*	.20*
PR: isolated			--	.55**	-.17*
PR: systemic				--	.05

Source: Own elaboration. Note: PR = perceptions of racism, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 5.** Correlations ( $rs$ ) between SDO and main variables for each subpopulation

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
SDO-D	--	.13	-.36*	-.19	-.23	.12
SDO-E	.24*	--	-.16	.16	-.08	-.07
PR: Historical knowledge ( $d'$ )	.30**	.12	--	-.004	-.19	-.27*
PR: isolated	-.15	-.28*	-.05	--	.57**	-.03
PR: systemic	-.38**	-.39**	-.22*	.55**	--	.38**
Racial identity relevance	.26*	.25*	.15	-.35**	-.29**	--

Source: Own elaboration. Note: PR = perceptions of racism, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

To further examine this relationship, multiple linear regressions were carried out with the purpose of using the subcomponents of the historical knowledge measure; the hit and false alarm rates, to predict SDO-D (H5). For Black participants, it was shown that both subcomponents explained a significant portion of the variance in SDO-D,  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(2,57) = 5.30, p = .008$ . With both the false alarm rate ( $\beta = .27, p = .032$ ) and the hit rate ( $\beta = -.26, p = .045$ ) being significant predictors in the model. For White participants however, only the false alarm rate was a significant predictor of the variance in SDO-D,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1,78) = 4.36, p = .040$ . In this case, the hit rate was excluded from the model,

$\beta = .095$ ,  $p = .431$ . Regarding SDO-E, this dimension was not related to the historical knowledge subcomponents for Black participants. However, for White participants, the false alarm rate continued to be a significant predictor of SDO-E,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1,78) = 4.44$ ,  $p = .038$ . As before, the hit rate was redundant in the model ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p = .604$ ). Analyses of the racism perceptions of the whole sample confirmed the existence of a negative association between said variable and SDO-D. This was the case for both isolated incidents,  $rs(135) = -.17$ ,  $p = .047$ , and systemic manifestations,  $rs(135) = -.31$ ,  $p < .001$ . With respect to SDO-E, this negative association was significant for systemic manifestations,  $rs(135) = -.24$ ,  $p = .004$ , but not for isolated incidents. A further examination of each racial group revealed that these correlations were only significant for White participants, but not for Black participants. Specifically, for White Americans, SDO-E was negatively associated with perceptions of systemic,  $rs(77) = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ , and isolated racism,  $rs(77) = -.28$ ,  $p = .013$ , while SDO-D was only significantly associated with perceptions of systemic racism,  $rs(77) = -.38$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Because we had predicted opposing tendencies for each racial group in racial identity relevance, the two groups were examined separately in all the analysis pertaining to this variable. For White participants, a positive association was confirmed between CSE and SDO. This correlation was significant for both SDO-D,  $rs(77) = .26$ ,  $p = .019$ , and SDO-E,  $rs(77) = .25$ ,  $p = .028$ . With respect to the Black participants, the association between CSE and racial identity was statistically insignificant. Lastly, to evaluate racial differences in SDO, independent sample  $t$  tests were conducted. No racial differences were found in either of the subdimensions of SDO (see Table 6).

**Table 6.** Group means and differences in social dominance orientation

Measure	Black Americans  $n = 58$	White Americans  $n = 79$	$t$	$d$
SDO-D	1.45 (.77)	1.34 (.71)	-0.79	0.15
SDO-E	1.85 (.88)	1.58 (.81)	-1.90	0.31

Source: Own elaboration.

## 5. Discussion

The present study attempted to explain the racial gap in racism perceptions (Sommers & Norton) as a function of the differences in historical knowledge about racism. As in previous studies that have tested this hypothesis, historical knowledge was found to be significantly greater for Black Americans. However, despite conducting this study under

conditions that theoretically maximize racial differences, we failed to find statistically significant differences in the perception of racism. Nonetheless, the results strengthen evidence for the racial identity relevance hypothesis. The degree of identification with one's racial group was a moderator of the direct effect of the category *race* on perceptions of systemic racism, but not for isolated events. In this sense, greater in-group identification predicted the denial of racism for White participants, while the opposite tendency was observed for Black participants. Furthermore, it was shown that White participants perceived more isolated than systemic racism, which is congruent with previous research in which White Americans tended to have less systemic conceptions of racism than Black Americans (Strickhouser et al., 2019). Overall, in this variable, scores were higher than in previous research, however, this increment was especially noteworthy for White participants.

The gap in historical knowledge found in the first two studies cited (see Bonam et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013) was replicated. Interestingly, this difference was not due to variance in the hit rate, which was much higher than in previous studies. Instead, it was the result of the high false alarm rate exhibited by White participants. Additionally, a negative correlation was detected amongst White participants between historical knowledge and the perceptions of systemic racism, while both variables were unrelated for Black participants. At first glance, this result is the exact opposite to the hypothesized relationship between historical knowledge and racism perceptions.

The interpretations provided by the previous research on which this study is based, rooted in the demographic properties of the sample, have little relevance for the results of our study. In the interpretation of these results, we have drawn on the cultural context and tendencies of the states of Oregon and Washington, in the American Northwest. Most of the universities of these states are concentrated around Portland and Seattle. These cities, despite being two of the whitest, large, metropolitan areas in North America (Mayo & Turnbull, 2011) are both known on a national scale for several alternative and progressive aspects of their urban cultures (London, 2017; Wall-Johnson, 2020). To give a recent example, during the national protests that erupted during the summer of 2020, after the assassination of George Floyd, some of the most intense and prolonged protests took place in Portland and Seattle (Flaccus, 2020). In these cities, terms such as *structural racism* have entered the public lexicon and a discourse predominates centered on issues of identity and social justice (Seattle.gov, 2015). This climate is in stark contrast to that of the South and Midwest of the U.S., regions known for their conservative tendencies (Lang, 2013), in which the previous studies on the Marley hypothesis were conducted.



In congruence with these conditions, the participants in our study showed greater historical knowledge about racism than in previous studies, which is compatible with the cultural context. But in this respect, the high false alarm rate, especially amongst White participants, is also indicative of a tendency to identify racism even in cases of uncertainty. For the purpose of explaining these implications, we contextualize both the high levels of racism perceptions and false alarm rates, on behalf of the White participants, within an urban subculture immersed in values of racial justice.

The first two instruments applied in the present study contain items relative to the history of racism and to racial identity. In this way, one can affirm that the participants were already conscious of the topics of race and identity when they reported their racism perceptions in the subsequent scale. We propose that, in urban contexts such as those of Portland and Seattle, White Americans understand these themes through a framework that entails substantial limitations for the measurement of racism perceptions. Thus, in liberal, White, educated, North American contexts, notions such as *racial justice* and *White privilege* have gained relevance in the ways in which White people understand the relationship between their racial identity and the history of racial oppression (Grzanka et al., 2020). Within this framework, complicity in a racist system is stigmatized, while greater awareness regarding its manifestations is prized. In this manner, we found that Whites identified less with their racial group, in comparison to Black participants and most notably, with regard to White subjects from previous studies on the Marley hypothesis. We link this identarian framework to the propensity shown by White participants to perceive and affirm the existence of racism, which guides us to question the construct validity of self-reported perceptions of racism. Hence, we propose that in this context the perception of racism is more determined by the mentioned sociocultural factors than by historical knowledge about racism. This interpretation is congruent with the relationship found between CSE and perceptions of systemic racism, in which it was found that White participants perceived more racism as their CSE levels diminished. From this perspective we suggest that the mentioned negative association detected in White Americans, between historical knowledge and racism perceptions, could be due to an inclination to be aware of racism which in turn, would be responsible for the response bias which produced on the one hand, high racism perceptions, and on the other, lower historical knowledge scores due to the elevated false alarm rate.

With regards to SDO, we had anticipated that support for social hierarchy-enhancing attitudes would be negatively correlated with historical knowledge about racism. Surprisingly, opposite tendencies were found for each racial group and, in general, the effect of historical knowledge in SDO was only significant for SDO-D, which has been

related to “open” or “traditional” forms of racism (Ho et al., 2012). Effect sizes tended to be smaller and insignificant in the results referring to SDO-E, which has been tied to more subtle forms of racism. The results of the Black participants sustain the hypothesis that greater historical knowledge about racism is related to less support for hierarchy-legitimizing attitudes. However, the opposite tendency was found upon analyzing the White participant’s data, which at first sight would suggest that support for hierarchy-legitimizing attitudes tends to increase with gains in historical knowledge about racial hierarchy. Historical knowledge was computed as the difference between the false alarm and hit rates obtained via a *True* or *False* questionnaire. Analyses of SDO scores as a function of these two subcomponents showed that both predicted SDO in the case of Black participants, indicating that lower historical knowledge predicted higher SDO levels. However, for White participants, only the false alarm rate was a significant predictor while the hit rate was not statistically related to either of the SDO dimensions. Those individuals who overestimated the amount of true historical events related to the history of racism, tended to score lower in SDO, which suggests that in the case of the White participants, SDO scores could be more related to the tendency to identify racism in cases of uncertainty (false alarms), than with historical knowledge per se.

We had further anticipated that low SDO levels would be associated with greater racism perceptions, a prediction that was supported by the White participant’s data. However, for Black participants, these two variables were not related. This trend repeated itself with regard to the association between SDO and CSE; high CSE levels predicted high SDO, while the two were unrelated for Black participants. In addition, between-group differences in SDO were not found. We cannot offer a unitary theoretical framework from which to integrate these racial group-specific tendencies. However, the existence of these opposing tendencies is compatible with the premise that fundamental racial divergencies exist in the understanding of racism. The role of the false alarm rate is congruent with our interpretation of the data relevant to the Marley hypothesis, in which White subjects tended to perceive more racism and to adopt a liberal strategy in the historical knowledge quiz. The relationships found between CSE, racism perceptions, historical knowledge and SDO on behalf of Whites is compatible with a contextual interpretation, rooted in the white, urban, cultural values of the Pacific Northwest. Regarding Black participants, support for hierarchy-legitimizing attitudes was predicted by historical ignorance, which is compatible with the *epistemologies of ignorance* perspective. Interestingly, for these participants, SDO was not related to CSE or racism perceptions. As such, we suggest that, for White people Oregon and Washington, the cultural values and social imperatives relative to racism and racial identity are more

strictly defined in comparison with Black individuals. Both the identity politics and the social justice culture identified in this region are recognized for being predominantly white phenomena (Jardina, 2019).

The limitations of the present study should be recognized, such as the relatively weak sample size. In this regard, as has been mentioned, the recruitment of Black Americans was greatly hampered by the low proportion of this group in the target population. With respect to the representativity of our sample, it should be stated that the sample here selected was undoubtedly more representative of urban populations of Oregon and Washington, in detriment of rural populations. Additionally, being a transversal study, it is highly probable that our results are specific to the temporal moment in which they were produced. This last limitation has been partially addressed by our interpretation of the data, rooted in the spatiotemporal context.

Relative to the implications and future lines of research, as has been shown in the existing literature, differences exist in how Black and White people perceive and understand racism (Johnson et al., 2019; Rucker et al., 2019; Simon et al., 2019; Sommers & Norton, 2006). In light of this, we suggest that the responses of both groups in the self-reported perception of racism scale do not reflect the same processes. As we have stressed, the defense of an “*anti-racist*” self-image on behalf of the White participants is closely linked to how they reported their racism perceptions, thus the social and identarian imperative of being aware of racism can be considered exclusive to this group (Analayo, 2020; Rios & Mackey, 2021; Suttie, 2019). In this way, even if the two groups showed equal levels of racism perception, the two scores could be the product of distinct underlying processes.

The psychometric properties of the instruments used here to measure the perception of racism, and historical knowledge, constitute another aspect worthy of consideration. In this regard, within the Marley hypothesis framework, it is assumed that a given amount of racism perceived in a situation, real or hypothetical, represents a quantitative variable that enables the comparison between racial groups. Meanwhile, the theoretical premise of the hypothesis simultaneously depends on the existence of fundamental differences in how each group perceives and understands racism. We suggest that said differences would undermine the validity of between-group comparisons. After all, if the two groups understand, perceive and are exposed to racism in such different ways, would not their respective thresholds of what constitutes racism be equally different? For future research on the Marley hypothesis, we recommend the exploration of alternative modes of capturing these racial differences that would permit more conceptual coherence

between-group comparisons. We additionally propose that racism perceptions should be measured at the beginning of the questionnaire, so as to reduce the possible priming effects exercised by the items relating to historical knowledge and racial identity. Regarding the items themselves used to measure this variable, we recommend the use of hypothetical, or real, cases that are less socio-politically charged.

In the same vein, the historical knowledge quiz did not adequately discriminate between participants in comparison with previous studies, as is shown by the high average false alarm rates (.96 and .95 for Black and White participants, respectively). Again, we anchor the relative ease with which the participants completed this measure in our contextual interpretation and, specifically, in the national attention dedicated to racism during the *summer of racial reckoning* (Chang & Martin, 2020; Lavalley & Johnson, 2020). Similarly, for all the utility of the *True or False* format in applying signal detection theory and subsequently conceptualizing historical knowledge as *reality attunement*, we consider that this format was problematic due to the social values associated with the awareness of racism, which has led us to reinterpret the high false alarm rate through an identity-based perspective. We propose the use of a multiple-choice quiz that would be less contaminated by these values. Furthermore, we propose that the items should be reevaluated, with the level of historical awareness of the target population as a reference point.

In short, there are multiple implications that could be derived from studies of this type that focus on interpreting perceptions of racism by taking into consideration its sociocultural, historical and structural nature. Of special interest is Martín's (2024) position on the roots and routes of epistemology of ignorance and his recommendation on trying to restore knowledge about other communities, avoiding the discrediting of certain groups by others and intervening on this racial gap in perceptions of racism. From this arises the need to implement changes at a holistic level, not focused exclusively on individualistic ideologies, but on the psychosocial roots that give meaning to collective identity and the social categorization processes that support them. In this sense, Lou et al. (2024), propose the use of social networks as platforms for the dissemination of sociopolitical issues, basing it on approaches close to the theory of self-categorization and collective action. Consequently, avoiding inaction regarding racial injustices requires intervention at a systemic level, promoting greater knowledge about the socio-historical conditions of marginal groups, attitudinal changes regarding outgroups and the normalization of inequalities, as well as promoting critical perspectives.

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