Politicized White Identity in the U.S. Today: Applied Understandings from Social Psychology

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Abstract:

This thesis will attempt to develop increased understanding of the politicization of white racial identity in the context of the modern U.S. political system by applying branches of social identity theory from the field of social psychology to political science research regarding white identity politics. The U.S. context presents both a unique history of intergroup racial relations, as well as a current political environment in which identity politics are becoming increasingly salient for all racial groups. This thesis also seeks to distinguish identity politics practiced by dominant societal groups, such as white Americans, from identity politics practiced by non-dominant groups, such as black Americans, and argues that mitigating the negative ramifications of white identity politics does not necessitate a repudiation of identity politics as a paradigm and means of organizing collective political action for non-dominant groups in society. Ultimately, this thesis finds that social identity theories, and system justification theory in particular, serve as a useful lens for political science to analyze white identity politics through, and that social psychology as a discipline provides insight and potential remedies for abating white identity politics without negating the importance that identity politics, or the politics of recognition, can have in the process of creating racial progress for non-dominant racial groups in liberal democracies.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The Black Lives Matter movement and subsequent reactionary movements from white nationalist groups in the U.S. have made extremely visible the politicization of black and white group identities in America, and has given the polarization between Democrats and Republicans a more apparent racialized quality. Identity politics as a conceptual paradigm and as an organizational mechanism for collective action have been critiqued as being ultimately harmful to democracy on the grounds that even identity politics being practiced by non-dominant or minority groups seeing redress for past wrongs from the government only cause harm due to the reactionary measures they incite from more incendiary white nationalist or populist groups (Walters 2018, Lilla 2016). Does the unique issue of white identity politics necessitate that all variations of identity politics will create outcomes harmful to liberal democracy? Or is there a way of addressing issues presented by white identity politics without writing off politics of recognition on the whole? (Fraser 1998).

This thesis seeks to further the understanding of white identity politics as a mobilizing force for white Americans' political and voting behavior in the modern U.S. context by providing a systematic review of the literature regarding white identity politics in the field of political science and analyzing the findings with theories from the field of social psychology that regard social identity and intergroup behavior. Only in the last twenty years or so has white identity politics been studied as a distinct phenomenon in political science literature, and only more recently has it been connected to social identity theory, which emerged in the social psychology literature in the late 1970's. Concepts and measures capturing white identity politics as a force in

American politics have increasingly garnered attention as political scientists sought to explain the outcome of the 2016 American presidential election. The increased focus on this issue presents an opportunity to distinguish white identity politics as a distinct means of political organization, mobilization and motivating factor for white political and voting behavior in the United States from the concept of identity politics that has been used to describe these activities and motivations for non-dominant groups in the U.S., particularly black Americans. This thesis claims that powerful psychological processes around ingroup identity are extremely relevant in the current U.S. political context, and that factors such as status threat from increasing demographic changes and politicians' capitalization on sentiments linked to white racial identification will only make the issues raised by politicized white identity more pertinent to analyzing political outcomes in the U.S.

The U.S. has been selected as a sort of case study or specific contextual focus for this analysis because of both its unique history around race relations and because of the current political climate as of the summer of 2020. Group tensions between white and black Americans are not only quite visible at this moment, but also identity approaches to politics are being employed by both groups either in support of the Black Lives Matter movement or in reactionary response movements. Hope for achieving social justice and creating more progressive racial and economic policy will rely partially on understanding the mechanisms of the politicization of white identity; this thesis aims to utilize understandings of group identification processes from social psychology in order to cultivate that understanding further in the field of political science. This thesis takes the view that applications of social identity and system justification theories are key to understanding white identity politics, parsing out the motivations and outcomes of politicized

white identity, and finding solutions to the divisiveness and polarization, as well as threat to racial progress, those outcomes are contributing to in U.S. politics today. This thesis also seeks to clarify some disagreements in the field of political science around the paradigm of identity politics itself, primarily if the effects of white identity politics be mitigated without condemning the entire paradigm of identity politics, which this thesis claims continue to be a useful means for minority groups to demand recognition and reparations within the U.S. political system.

Chapter 2 – Identity Politics as a Concept

Identity politics has become an increasingly relevant paradigm through which political scientists, pundits and activists have been conducting or analyzing politics and political behavior. The current conception of identity politics has become quite confused as analysts and actors in the field have tendencies to imbue different meanings in their usage of the term when applying it to political phenomena or group political behavior. For this reason it's important to make a few notes about the distinctions between the "identity politics" that many activists advocating for the rights of marginalized communities engage in from the manner in which this thesis will be discussing white identity politics.

White identity politics is distinct from the identity politics practiced by minorities or disadvantaged groups as it is the politics of a dominant group in America. Traditional literature on identity politics focuses primarily on the connection between self-ascribed identity and political behavior or collective action, with a specific focus on non-dominant groups, and in the U.S. with a particular focus on its use amongst black political actors. Less focus was given to the factors that may make identity politically salient, as the oppression of black people in America served as a fairly easily-identifiable means of motivation for political action based on identity. One of the earliest written uses of the phrase "identity politics" was in fact included in a statement from an American black feminist lesbian organization called the Combahee River Collective; the statement placed emphasis on "the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives" and stated that their [the Collective's] "focusing on their own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics" (Combahee River Collective 1979, p. 1-2). White identity must be conceptualized as a very

different phenomenon because it is concerned with preserving the status quo in a system already designed to uphold white hegemonic power, rather than operating as a means of establishing one's identity as legitimate and worthy of equal access to power in a political system the way it functions for non-dominant groups in society (Walters 2018).

Black identity politics has traditionally in the field of political science been discussed and subsequently analyzed in terms of "levels of black racial identification" for the purposes of parsing out how these levels of identification to black race may impact an individual's voting or political behavior (Wong & Cho 2005). Racial identification as a measure then captures some essence of "in-group" attitude. White identity politics, on the other hand, remained largely unstudied in any comparable way within the field. Studies utilizing measures of white in-group attitudes were neglected in the field, primarily in favor of measures capturing out-group attitudes such as a racial resentment towards blacks or other minority groups, until the early 2000's (Wong & Cho 2005; Sears and Savalei 2006). The result has been that the field maintained a limited understanding of how levels of white racial identification may motivate whites' voting or political behavior, and thereby no proper means of comparing levels of in-group racial identification between white and black Americans. One explanation for the lack of research on white identity politics is the perceived invisibility of white racial identity (Jardina 2020; Sears & Savalei 2006). White people live under systems that were designed by white people to uphold their own cultural, social, political, and economic hegemony, the privileges white people still experience by benefitting from these systems allows for white people to live their lives without consciously acknowledging their race very often or realizing how their racial identification may affect their political behavior or vote choice. As a privileged group, whites don't have the same

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levels of racial identification as oppressed groups; as a group that has always had an institutionalized advantage, why would an identification with racial identity have any political salience? As privilege usually bestows upon its owners a verifiable lack of certain experiences and thereby a lack of awareness as well (Jardina 2020, p. 2; Schildkraut 2017, p. 89, Sears and Savalei 2006; MacIntosh 1988). But alternatively, some researchers claim that while analyses of white racial identification have been traditionally neglected in the literature that group privilege has actually functioned to make whites more acutely aware of and attached to their group identity, as along with it comes distinguished status and other material advantages (Berry et al. 2019). By this logic then, whites would exhibit strong levels of racial identification as a means of reifying their dominance in society.

The latter type of "awareness" of white racial identity and subsequent level of white racial identification characterizes white in-group attitudes for most of American history, and that the previously mentioned conception of white racial identity, of whiteness as a sort of invisible set of privileges, is a more recent characterization of white racial identity in the U.S. Because this more recent understanding of whiteness in effect erases, or refuses to recognize, power imbalances between white and black people in the U.S. political system, it has been called into question in recent analyses of American culture both in and outside of academia. This confrontation has created a paradigm in which both white people who seek to dismantle a system that favors whiteness, and those who seek to preserve this system that favors whiteness, are both operating from an awareness of, and in varying degrees, identification with the white race. In studies conducted on ethnocentrism and intergroup relations in Indonesia, Jaspars and Warnaen found evidence to dispel older ideas within social psychology that theorized that in-group favoritism

and out-group resentment essentially operated as two-sides of the same coin, finding that "ingroup favoritism was 'relatively independent' of outgroup attitudes" (Tajfel 1982, Wong & Cho 2005, Jaspars & Warnean 1982). By this logic then, white racial identification should not only be defined and studied by measurements of out-group attitudes as it was in the field of political science up until as recently as the early 2000's (Wong & Cho 2005). Untying these two phenomena frees up a conception of white identity politics that can be discussed in more precise terms and can be analyzed through a lens of white racial identification and in-group attitude measures as opposed to measures of out-group resentment.

Chapter 3 – Context: American White Identity Politics in the Field of Political Science

In recent years political science has utilized this concept of in-group attitudes held by white Americans to attempt to understand the 2016 American presidential election and subsequent election of Donald Trump. Measuring this concept has often taken shape through measures of white racial identification, which while distinct from the concept of white identity politics on the whole, has become commonplace as a means of capturing and analyzing the manifestations of white identity politics unfolding in American politics today. Across the literature white racial identification is measured differently, but many researchers utilize the American National Election Study (ANES). For example, an ANES question regarding "group-closeness has been used as a simple measure of white racial identification (distinct from its politicization); the question presents a list of groups and asks subjects to "tell the number [of] those groups you feel particularly close to—people who are most like you in their ideas and interests and feelings about things" (Wong & Cho 2005). Wong & Cho's measure of group closeness for whites found that 51% of whites reported feeling "close" to whites as a group. While they reported no linkage between this measure of white racial identification and policy position (although more recent research utilizing more precise measures of identification does), in an uncanny predictor of 2016 Cho and Wong expressed a concern that because a collective sense of white identity certainly "exists and is related to in-group attitudes", as well as appears to be unstable in terms of its politicization, that it may be "triggered" by "a demagogue [who] could influence the salience of these identities to promote negative out-group attitudes, link racial identification more strongly to policy preferences, and exacerbate group conflict" (2005, p. 716). Jardina's more recent research revealed that over the last seven years, between 30-40% of whites have stably shown

high levels of racial identification, and around 20% have shown high levels of white group

consciousness, which is generally considered "politicized" group racial identity and captures

whites who "have a sense of discontent over the status of their group and believe whites should

work together politically to benefit their group's collective interest" (Jardina 2020, p. 6700).

Whites who show high levels of white consciousness show the same patterns of political

behavior as whites who express higher levels of racial identification, but to a more extreme

degree (Jardina 2020).

This notion of increased salience of white identity politics, or of American whites' political

behaviors becoming increasingly motivated by or tied to their level of white racial identification

calls for further analysis of how white racial identification operates. Social psychology provides

a lens through which this analysis can be conducted with its understandings of social identity

theory. In seminal works on social identity theory and intergroup relations Henri Tajfel outlined

social psychology's social identity theory, although at the time, this theory was not thoroughly

applied to American whites and when it was, it was not applied with much distinction from

studies of racism and out-group resentment (Tajfel 1982). But the concept of this "increased

salience" of white identity politics that has been increasingly referenced in political science

literature to explain white voting behavior in 2016 can be connected to and understood by social

identity theory. In a fruitful correspondence published in Political Psychology in the years 2001-

2002 social psychologist Penelope Oakes and political scientist Leonie Huddy discuss the

"salience" hypothesis in regards to the activation of a group identity; I find that Oakes treatment

of the subject is akin to how political scientists are discussing Trump's ability to make salient

white racial identification in the U.S. context today. Huddy conceptualizes salience as being

dependent more purely on external factors, for example, the salience of a black individual's racial identification being higher in the context of a majority-white work environment. I remain more convinced by Oakes conception of salience: "Salience is not a feature of situations, nor is it a feature of individuals, as it emerges from an interaction between the two." (Oakes 2002 p. 816). The activation of the salience of particular social identities as going beyond external social or political factors and necessitating a relationship to individuals' psychological attachments to their own constructed identities exemplifies a point where understandings from social psychology can provide key insights to analyses in the field of political science on identity politics.

This relates to political science's understanding of status threat, another theory proposed to explain whites' voting behavior in the 2016 election. Status threat focuses on external factors, like demographic changes, that cause whites levels of identification with their race to increase, as they feel a threat to their status as the dominant group in the U.S. with hegemonic control of political, social, cultural and economic systems in the country. In her paper "Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote", Diana Mutz defines the status threat thesis as "status threat felt by the dwindling proportion of traditionally high-status Americans (i.e., whites, Christians, and men) as well as by those who perceive America's global dominance as threatened combined to increase support for the candidate who emphasized reestablishing status hierarchies of the past" (Mutz 2018). But Mutz goes on to touch on a psychological component to this status threat theory in claiming that because white male Christians have historically been viewed as the most "prototypically American" that this group has the "most to lose" psychologically if the popular conception of the prototypical American changes, and that

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this psychological resistance in turn shapes policy preferences and vote choices (Mutz). In their

book "Identity crisis: The 2016 presidential campaign and the battle for the meaning of

America", Sides et al. come to similar conclusions about the effects of status threat on white

Americans, and how it is interacting with constructions of white identity. According to Sides et

al. "when gains, losses or threats become salient, group identities develop and

strengthen...groups become more unified and more likely to develop goals or grievances, which

are the components of a politicized group consciousness" (2018, p. 3). As demographics in the

United States shift, whites in the U.S. are losing their majority status and for many whites this

translates to a loss, even if only hypothetical or symbolic, of political, cultural and economic

control, which spurs defensive behavior from whites who express a strong identification with

their racial identity (Mutz 2018, p. 2).

These analyses parsed out a brand of racialized economic anxiety, which is tied to status threat

and identity, as being distinct from the economic anxiety presented in the "left-behind thesis"

explanation for Trump's 2016 victory. The left-behind thesis is referential of the idea that Hillary

Clinton failed to appeal to many white working-class voters who have felt neglected by the

Democratic party and voted for Trump as a result of economic anxiety; Mutz describes this

theory as applying to "those who lost jobs or experienced stagnant wages due to the loss of

manufacturing jobs punished the incumbent party for their economic misfortunes" (2018, p.1).

Most analyses of white voting behavior in the 2016 presidential reject this theory in favor of

status threat or one that accounts for white identity politics; Sides et al. succinctly describe their

findings with the idea that the concern they found amongst white Trump supporters was not "I

might lose my job" but rather "people in my group are losing jobs to that other group" (2018, p.

8). In her paper "The wound of whiteness: Conceptualizing economic convergence as Trauma in the 2016 United States Presidential Election", Maureen Sioh pinpointed this racialized economic anxiety in other terms, finding that for white Trump supporters the issue was not "economic divergence from the wealthiest one percenters but, rather, economic convergence with other racialized groups", which reiterates the notion of a threat of status loss for whites who displayed less concern about increasing levels of income inequality between the wealthy and everyone else, but rather a particular concern for being economically on-par with other racial groups that they may perceive themselves as "above" in the socioeconomic hierarchy in the United States (2018, p. 113). In a portion of their book entitled "preeminence of identity over economics", Sides et al. utilized 2016 data from the American National Election Study and VOTER surveys and found that people who "were most likely to oppose immigration, dislike Muslims, and attribute racial inequality to blacks' lack of effort" were according to their models, 53 percentage points more likely to support Trump than those who held the most favorable views towards immigration, Muslims, and attribute racial inequality to systemic issues. Combining least favorable views towards immigration, Muslims, and racial inequality with higher perceptions of white identity revealed an even stronger tie to Trump support, as these voters were 93 points more likely to support Trump than those with the most favorable views; Sides et al. attribute this effect to "the power of white identity" (2018, p. 90-91). Sioh proposes that "Trump's campaign recognized that deeply rooted, yet easily tapped latent racial anxieties underpinned economic anxieties rather than the mainstream assumption of the reverse" (2018, p. 116). Because these explanations concern identity, they consequently concern analyses of psychological attachment to group identity. But the literature in the field of political science, while acknowledging this element, oft stops its analysis short at this juncture. In turn Huddy raises an important critique of social

psychology's social identity theory in that its literature and studies are too often devoid of meaningful context, claiming that a lack of consideration for the "sources of social identity in a real world complicated by history and culture has placed serious limits on the theory's application to political psychology" (Huddy 2001). Social identity theory in social psychology in both its origins and more recent understandings is more often applied to non-dominant groups and their collective action organization as opposed to that of dominant groups (Reicher 2004). The benefits of applying social identity theory to understandings of white identity politics in the field of political science will be explored.

Chapter 4 – Relevant Theories from Social Psychology

4.1 Introduction of Social Identity and Social Categorization Theory

Social identity theory is utilized within social psychology as a means of understanding

intergroup relations and the personal psychological processes that drive the need for group

belonging and positive group distinction and has been applied to political science literature,

particularly research regarding ethnically divided societies (Horowitz 1998). Tajfel and Turner

define social identity as "that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their

knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and

emotional significance of that membership" and claims that achieving identification with a group

requires two, and sometimes three elements: "a cognitive one, in the sense of awareness of

membership; and an evaluative one, in the sense that this awareness is related to some value

connotations. The third component consists of an emotional investment in the awareness and

evaluations" (Tajfel 1982. p. 255). Group identity therefore contains elements of the internal,

such as psychological and emotional attachment to an identity, in conjunction and relationship

with external factors in the society at large. Political science research can provide useful analyses

of relevant political structures to ground social identity theory, and that in turn social psychology

studies can enrichen understandings of identity politics by turning the analysis away from larger,

de-personalized structures, and inwards towards group psychology or even to the individual

level, in its analysis of individual psychological attachment to an identity. Tajfel's understanding

of social identities is that they are relational in nature and arise through different groups seeking

to distinguish themselves from one another based on some value differentials. Looking at social

identity theory from a political science perspective Huddy identifies four factors that imbue

group membership with meaning for its members: valence of group membership (or intrinsic

attractiveness of belonging to a group for its members), social characteristics of typical group members, core group values, and characteristics of common outgroups; and she claims that an issue with political science research on the subject arises when researchers ignore these aspects of internal meaning in favor of focusing solely on group boundaries.

Social categorization theory on the other hand focuses more specifically on the relationship between individual and social identity across contexts or in changing contexts (Huddy 2001, 2002). Social categorization theory is oft applied in instances when categories may be more "fluid" or dependent on social context; but Huddy questions social psychology's inclination to consider identities as fluid when in reality most identities that people act from to organize collective political action appear to be quite stable, or at least individuals seem to maintain stable levels of identification with an identity point even if the identity categorization itself may be "fluid" or context dependent (for example gender and sexuality can be viewed as quite fluid, and individuals may perform their gender differently over time - and yet, many LGBTQA activists tend to quite stably identify with and mobilize as a part of the LGBTQA community) (Huddy 2001, p.147). Racial identification then becomes even more interesting here; while race itself is a social construct (AAA Statement on Race 1998), most individuals quite stably identify as the same race throughout their lives, as racial categories are perceived and viewed as quite bounded and fixed. Yet the degree to which an individual considers their racial identity as important to their identity overall can certainly vary, and Huddy makes a point of enquiring at what point does racial identification, or at what degree of racial identification, does this aspect of identity become important for political mobilization? This of course is extremely context dependent; however, political science literature suggests that levels of racial identification amongst white

people are actually quite stable; what does tend to change is how salient this identity is as a motivator for voting or political behavior at a given point in time. This conclusion seems to be reached in both social psychology and political science literature; identities often have a stability for individuals and groups of people, but as context changes so does behavior. Much of the recent literature around white identity politics also points to this idea of "latent but stable" levels of white racial identification amongst white Americans; the levels of identification remain somewhat stable overtime but the propensity of individuals to act politically from that identification with their white racial identity change (Jardina 2020; Wong & Cho 2005). This has manifested in fairly stable levels of white racial identification that may remain latent for a period of time until made salient by mechanisms such as status threat or rhetoric from political elites, and often an amalgamation of a variety of mechanisms such as these.

4.2 Introduction to System Justification Theory

System justification theory is concerned with how social identities interact with and are shaped by institutions and structures, as well as how strong social identities can often work to uphold or legitimize political, social, cultural and economic systems. Developed as a sort of critique or addendum to social identity theory, social justification theory seeks to ensure that analyses of social identities do not become separated from institutional contexts (Rubin & Hewstone 2004). This is essential for the usefulness of social identity theory to political science, as the discipline cannot analyze political phenomena entirely detached from the consideration of political institutions and systems. Without system justification theory to link the personal cognitive processes laid out by the theory to the systemic contexts that (help to) construct the social realities these phenomena are taking place in, any analysis utilizing social identity theory would be less grounded in the complexities that shape intergroup relations and its interactions with

political institutions and systems. System justification theory proposes individuals are generally motivated to "uphold the status quo and bolster the legitimacy of the existing social order" and that oppressed group members will unconsciously work to uphold the very systems that oppress them because while individuals have a psychological motive to view their own group(s) favorably, they also have a motivation to view the political and social systems under which they live favorably (Jost et al. 2004). In their paper "Social Identity, System Justification, and Social Dominance", Mark Rubin and Miles Hewstone claims that "Social identity theory proposes that group members passively reflect stable and legitimate status systems, while system justification theory proposes that group members actively legitimize and bolster status systems" (2004, p. 834). System justification theory presents an interesting lens through which the intersectionality of identities can be analyzed. Which group membership takes precedence for an individual - their gender, their race, their socioeconomic status? When studying white identity politics it's essential to consider other facets of identity and to acknowledge the many intersections of identity. System justification theory also suggests that when group boundaries, as well as their attached status and value delineations, are unstable or illegitimate, then more social competition arises between groups. This aspect of the theory could have a potential application to the current perception around race relations and hierarchies in the United States. The current political context in the U.S. suggests that a considerable portion of black (and white) Americans are vocally rejecting the legitimacy of the political system, in particular the criminal justice system via calling for defunding the police, eliminating bail and reforming the criminal justice system to one of rehabilitation as opposed to one of punishment. Why are some whites more inclined to be in solidarity with black Americans in denouncing the legitimacy of the system while others remain vested in upholding it alongside its perceived legitimacy? System justification theory can

offer some answers to this question as well as aid in increasing understanding around increased

salience of white identity as some whites feel motivated by status threat to defend the system and

maintain system-justifying beliefs (Jardina 2020, 2019; Wong & Cho 2005, Knowles & Tropp

2018; Mutz 2018; Sioh 2018).

Chapter 5 – Measuring Identity: Comparing Methods from Political Science and Social Psychology

Identity has been classified as an acutely difficult concept to measure, especially in its machinations from the personal, to the group, to the political (Snow 2013; Smith 2004; Abdelal et al. 2006). Political science is arguably a bit more simplistic in its chosen measures of identity than social psychology; the former tends to utilize more one-dimensional measures capturing notions of "group-closeness", "linked-fate" or even perceived group status threat as a heuristic measurement (although perceptions of status threat are closely tied to group identity they are distinct from it and function as more of an "activator" of group identity as opposed to a measure of group identity itself; measures of status threat would likely fail to capture more latent group identifications that are currently less salient for a respondent) (Wong & Cho 2005; Berry et al. 2019; Mutz 2018, Sioh 2018). Social psychology's more precise means of measurement can allow for a more nuanced evaluation of white identity politics and its ramifications.

In their paper "Identity as a Variable", Abdelal et al. offer a useful treatment on measuring identity; they view social identity as consisting of two key components: content and contestation. Content refers to the constructed meaning of a collective group identity, which they break into four non-mutually exclusive categories: "constitutive norms; social purposes; relational comparisons with other social categories; and cognitive models", while contestation refers to the degree of consensus within the group around these constructed meanings (Abdelal et al. 2006). Constitutive norms refer to the rules of group membership, both formal and informal; social purposes refer to "shared goals" of the group; relational comparisons capture they way group identities are constructed in relation to one another, bounding themselves by what their group "is

not" (this aspect takes into account outgroup attitudes); and finally cognitive models "refer to worldviews or understandings of political and material conditions and interests that are shaped by a particular identity" (Abdelal et al. 2006). This cognitive aspect represents the way varying degrees of identification with a collective identity can then shape people's political understandings. Across the literature in both political science and social psychology, identity has come to be viewed as flexible over time; aspects of an individual's identity may change over time or may become more or less salient to the individual's self-conception or feeling of belonging to a certain group identity, which in turn shapes the individual's manner of situating themselves in the world and affects the political understandings they may glean from this cognitive process (Abdelal et al. 2006; Kuo & Maraglit 2012; Tajfel 1982).

In a later work on measuring identity, "Measuring Individual Identity: Experimental Evidence", Alexander Kuo and Yotam Margalit evaluate "self-reported identity attachments" along three identity aspects that capture this sense of flexibility in identity: "stability over time, susceptibility to situational factors, and casual role in shaping preferences" (Kuo & Margalit 2012). In order to evaluate the stability of identity over time, they conducted surveys measuring first a respondent's "strongest or primary identity" (categories consisting of nationality, race/ethnicity, religion, gender, occupation) and then the strength of that identification; they found that even among respondents who who showed the strongest level of identity attachment to their "primary" or "strongest" identity, one-third changed their response about what their primary identity attachment was within a two-month period (Kuo & Margalit 2012, p. 463). When primed for a specific identity category, respondents also were more likely to select said category as their primary identity and to identify more strongly with that identity aspect, although respondents

with higher education levels (at least some college experience) were more responsive to priming than respondents with lower levels of education (those with a high school degree or less) (2012, p. 468). Their primary finding in analyzing how identity attachments may affect policy preferences was that different identity attachments may be made more or less salient for an individual through priming, and that individuals maintain a "repertoire of meaningful identities" that they may strategically or situationally feel varying degrees of strength in attachment to (2012, p. 474). Kuo and Margalit concern themselves more with an individual's interpretation or internalization of a group identity, while Abdelal et al.'s framework makes room for group conceptions of group identity in their discussion of contestation. They conclude that the presence of varying degrees of contestation around the content or meaning of a group identity supports a constructivist view of identity without necessitating that "actors on the ground view their identities as constructed" (2006, p. 701). Abdelal et al. also claim a conceptual advantage of their framework is the manner in which it addresses "meaning" through contestedness in a way that the concept of salience, which they describe as "a critical variable used by psychologists to study the multiple and overlapping identities of individuals as individuals" and which are affected by changing contexts, cannot (2006, p. 701). In a reflection of Kuo and Margalit's concerns about how important or salient a collective identity may be to an individual member of a group, Abdelal et al. explain that this measurement of "groupness" cannot only be concerned with salience but also must take into account constructed meanings and therefore the contestations over that meaning within a group (2006, p. 701).

From a social psychology perspective, models used to capture group identity become more complex and capture the finer points of the degree to which an individual may feel part of their

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ingroup, which is why incorporating these models into more mainstream political science literature on identity politics in general can prove to be fruitful and lend more complexity to political science's analyses of identity and the links between identity and political preferences and behaviors. In their paper "Group-Level Self-Definition and Self-Investment: A Hierarchical (Multicomponent) Model of In-Group Identification" Leach et al. establish a framework to analyze identity within that more adequately parses out the aspects of identity in order to link them to particular cognitive processes that in turn inform political behavior. Leach et al. claim that ingroup identity can be analyzed by two more general dimensions, "group-level self-definition" and "self-investment"; these "higher-order" dimensions then house the more specific aspects of identity. Group-level self-definition is tied closely to Turner's self-categorization theory, which is concerned with the way an individual conceptualizes their identity "along the interpersonal-intergroup continuum" and claims that "as people defin[e] themselves and others as members of the same category they would self-stereotype in relation to the category and tend to see themselves as more alike in terms of the defining attributes of the category (Turner & Reynolds 2012, p. 402). Social categorization theory is concerned with the manner in which individuals may shift between social, or group, and individual identities depending on the context (Huddy 2001). There exists a tension here between what survey studies show to be true, that self-categorization processes reflect the flexibility of identity and its ability to change between contexts, and the reality of identity politics which is that many people seem to be motivated to behave or act from very stable identity points. The misunderstanding is that the identity points themselves may be stable, one for example cannot change their race or ethnicity, but the flexibility aspect can be encapsulated by the shifts an individual may experience between experiencing stronger or weaker feelings of identification with a fixed identity point; the

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flexibility of identity is a reflection of the fact that identity is comprised of constructed meanings.

Leach et al.'s inclusion of sub-dimensions in their model, placed under group-level self-definition: individual self-stereotyping and in-group homogeneity, is useful in its allowance of flexibility in constructed meanings. "Perceived in-group homogeneity establishes the in-group as a coherent social entity", which certainly reflects levels of ingroup consensus over what commonalities the group has and what these commonalities in turn mean for group members (Leach et al. 2008, Lickel et al., 2000). Self-stereotyping involves then how closely a group member may feel they reflect these common group aspects. This is often described as manifesting in a comparison between the individual and a "group prototype", although the notion of a group prototype is problematic in the framework of many group identities, for example how would one define a group prototype for a race or gender? This is certainly informed by the constituted norms referenced by Abdelal et al., but is certainly a source of contestation amongst groups as common sense reveals there is no one "prototypical" way to embody femininity or blackness for example. If anything, a further look into what the "group prototype" concept may entail for white Americans could be fruitful; a key conception of racism is that for minority groups, or outgroups in society, often one member of the group is deemed as representative of the group as a whole by the society's ingroup, whereas ingroup members are not held as representatives of the entire ingroup in the same manner. Whiteness, as such, is allowed to have more flexibility in its "prototype" than blackness in America (Sesko & Biernat 2010). The concept of linked-fate, already employed in the political science literature on white identity politics is also relevant to group-level self-definition, and can be an informative measure when

used to capture an individual's perceived level of belonging to a group (Schildkraut 2017, Barry et al. 2019, Tajfel 1982).

Leach et al.'s second primary dimension, self-investment houses the three other subcategories capturing identity: satisfaction, solidarity and centrality. Leach et al. conceive of group-level self-investment as "manifest[ing] in individuals' positive feel- ings about their in-group membership as well as [the] sense that they have a bond with the in-group…as well as in the importance and salience of individuals' in-group membership" (2008, p. 148). Satisfaction captures how positive one feels about their group in general as well as their own membership to that group; although, an important clarification on this point is that positive and negative feelings towards one own group can often sit along-side one another and aren't necessarily in some relationship. (Leach et al. 2006; Tajfel & Turner 1979; Walker et al. 1988). Maintaining satisfaction with one's group and group membership can motivate some legitimization of the group's wrongdoing, especially advantaged group's wrongdoings, and can contribute to system justifying beliefs (Ashmore et al. 2004). Leach et al. define solidarity in their framework as "based in a psychological bond with, and commitment to, fellow in-group members, it should be associated with a sense of belonging, psychological attachment to the in-group, and coordination with other group members"; in this way it links the individual to the group in a manner that goes beyond self-conceptualization and bleeds into willingness to organize with their group or support and engage in collective action on behalf of the group, which will also be discussed in a later section of this paper which will focus on system justification and collective action (2006, p. 147). Finally, centrality captures the salience of an individual's particular group membership or identity; essentially asking how central to one's sense of identity is a particular group

membership. Leach et al. describe centrality as manifesting in an individual's motivation to keep up with group events, as well as in their motivation to respond to threats to the group; if a particular group is threatened then an individual may only feel motivated by that threat if their membership to that particular group is quite central to their identity (2006 p. 147; Tajfel & Turner 1979; Sellers & Shelton 2003). This raises an interesting relationship between salience and centrality, as according to the consensus in the field, particular group memberships may become more or less salient to an individual in differing contexts and therefore more or less "central" to an individuals' conception of their own identity; presumably then, these factors of identity can play a strong role in individual response to group or system threat, which in turn politicizes identity in often meaningful ways (Smith 2004; Schildkraut 2017, Sears & Savalei 2006; Jardina 2020; Wong & Cho 2005; Mutz 2018; Sioh 2018; Tajfel 1982).

Defending their model for in-group identification, Leach et al. conduct seven studies testing the strength of their framework; several in particular show interesting results that could hold value for analyzing white identity and its manifestations in American politics. In one of the studies, they test correlations between the five components of identity their model is based on against white Dutch individual's perceived differences between themselves and Muslims, as well as their perceived threat due to the tension between the groups, and finally the level of support these white Dutch respondents for statements like "I want Dutch Muslims to integrate better", "Dutch identity is threatened by terrorism" and "The Netherlands is responsible for provoking terrorism" (See Leach et al. 2006, p. 150 for description of operationalization of variables). Another study evaluated the same group with further questions after a deadly bombing at a Madrid train station in 2004 that was attributed to "Muslim terrorism", examining aspects of cultural threat with

evaluating levels of support for statements such as "Muslim headscarves should be banned" and "The Madrid bombing threatens my sense of being Dutch", as well as evaluating a general sense of threat felt by respondents. With both of these studies their model proved useful in singling out the dimensions of centrality and solidarity, which both proved useful predictors of white European Dutch attitudes and levels of perceived threat. Higher levels of centrality of Dutch identity predicted higher levels of perceived threat, while higher levels of solidarity with Dutch identity predicted wanting better integration of Muslims into Dutch society; satisfaction with Dutch identity predicted a perception that the Netherland's "political and other actions were less responsible for provoking terrorism" (2006, p. 159).

In a final study Leach et al. evaluated their identity variables against group-based guilt, expanding on understandings from previous literature on intergroup relations that explore how members of an advantaged ingroup can "experience their in-group's mistreatment of an out-group as a threat to their group identity" (2006, p. 160). Previous studies have evaluated this issue, and notably one has examined the American context, establishing links between higher levels of satisfaction with group belonging amongst white Americans and lower levels of guilt about their groups treatment of black Americans (Swim & Miller 1999). Again their model's ability to parse out different aspects of identity allowed for a more nuanced analysis of what specific aspects of identity and group belonging may predict threat perceptions and responses to that perceived threat amongst members of the ingroup. Leach et al. found in analyzing white Europeans for perceived threat and group guilt response that "centrality was shown to have a unique association with the perception of threat to the in-group that was not shared by the satisfaction and solidarity components of self-investment. In contrast, satisfaction was shown to

have a unique association with defense against threats to the in-group and its image" (2006, p. 162). Other frameworks used to operationalize identity were not shown to have as precise a predictive power or ability to parse out different aspects of identity in the same manner as Leach et al.'s framework and I think more could be done utilizing this framework in the American context. (Phinney 1992; Smith et al. 1999, Swim & Miller 1999). In particular, a less unilateral measurement or conception of identity could be useful to apply to analyses of the interaction between white identity and the 2016 Presidential election. In much of the political science literature on the subject, while white identity was shown to be a salient mobilizing force for white American voters, gauging strength of white racial identification amongst white Americans was often conducted along a more one-dimensional scale, achieved by asking questions that regard self-definitional aspects as opposed to an in-depth evaluation of self-investment in that particular identity (Schildkraut 2017, Sears & Savalei 2006; Jardina 2020; Wong & Cho 2005; Mutz 2018; Sioh 2018, Sides et al. 2018). Breaking down these captures of identity that have been used to analyze white Americans voting behavior in 2016 into more distinct notions, such as satisfaction with white identity and solidarity with other white Americans (manifested as a willingness to engage in collective action on behalf of the group identity) can increase political science's understandings of the particular implications different aspects of identity can have on distinct phenomena such as collective action, candidate selection, and the experience of white-guilt.

Chapter 6 – System Justification Theory and White Identity Expanded

As previously noted, system justification theory provides a useful lens for analyzing the dynamics between identities and political systems in a manner that goes beyond what social identity theory has to offer on its own. Recall that the primary claim of system justification theory is that individuals are "motivated to justify the status quo of the status systems that their social groups inhabit" (Rubin & Hewstone 2004, p. 833). Social identity theory tends to regard system stability legitimacy and legitimacy as a priori moderating factors of the manifestations of identity politics, but system justification theory critiques social identity theory by regarding this as a shortcoming and seeks to redress this failing by evaluating how intergroup behavior and group identity affects perceptions of system stability and legitimacy (Rubin & Hewstone 2004; Reicher 2004). System justification theory is then, necessarily, closely tied to perceived status threat at various levels, the individual, the group, and the system; for advantaged groups, support for the status quo or for existing systems usually can exist happily alongside positive feelings about themselves and the group they belong to, whereas for disadvantaged groups positive feelings about the status quo often come at the cost of increased negative feelings directed at themselves and their own group, often implicitly (Jost et al. 2004, Jost et al. 2018). These three levels are "ego justification", or "the need to develop and maintain a favorable self image to feel valid, justified and legitimate as an individual actor", "group justification", an expansion of the prior form extended to "the desire to develop and maintain favorable images if one's own group and justify the actions of fellow ingroup members" and following from this system justification which Jost and Banaji describe further as "captur[ing] social and psychological needs to imbue the status quo with legitimacy and see it as good, fair, natural, desirable and even inevitable" (2004, p. 887). System justification theory tends to exist in disagreement with itself over how

system justifying beliefs and ideologies impact disadvantaged or minority groups collective and individual psyches, but much of the literature has developed to explain why disadvantaged groups will actively support systems that disenfranchise or discriminate against them; in their original paper outlining the theory of system justification Jost and Banaji emphasize this focus on non-dominant groups by defining system justification as the "process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized even at the expense of personal and group interest" (Jost et al. 2004, Jost & Banaji 1994, p. 2). Jost and Banaji hypothesize that under a system justifying ideology that "members of low-status groups will be more likely to exhibit outgroup favoritism on implicit measures than on explicit measures, whereas members of high-status groups will be more likely to exhibit ingroup favoritism on implicit measures than on explicit measures" and support this with a claim that the effects system justification can have on minority groups can be exemplified through studies that measure explicit and implicit ingroup favoritism amongst white Americans and black Americans. They hypothesize that a similar pattern will show when a system is perceived (by all groups of society) as legitimate. A particular point of interest under this theory then is what sort of cleavages develop when perceiving a system as legitimate becomes broken down along racial lines, as is a trend in U.S. politics today. Arguably according to system justification and status threat theories, the organization and mobilization of the Black Lives Matter movement can be viewed as an expression of part of the electorates perception that the political system in the U.S. is illegitimate, while reactionary organization from conservative whites can be framed as an embodiment of a perceived status threat to the system they view as legitimate, hence motivating collective action to defend the system.

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6.1 Triggers of System-Justifying Behavior

Following the previous conclusion, it is important to consider what can spark system-justifying behaviors. There are specific contexts that have been found to motivate an increase in system-justifying behavior from all groups in a society: system threat, system dependence, system inescapability and low personal control (Kay & Friesen 2011, p. 360). In their paper "On Social Stability and Social Change: Understanding When System Justification Does and Does Not Occur", Aaron Kay and Justin Friesen define system threat as "events that potentially jeopardize the systems legitimacy in some way such as terrorist attacks or insufficient government responses to natural disasters", but in laboratory settings researchers often simulate system threat by exposing research participants to articles critical of their own country or some other system the respondent may identify with (2011, p. 361). System dependence as a factor speaks to the notion that individuals will experience more motivation to justify or view as legitimate the systems upon which they depend the most on, which is quite conceptually tied to the notion of system inescapability as well; when an individual perceives themselves as unable to escape a system they will develop cognitive functioning that defends the system in order to make living under it more bearable. System dependence and inescapability, as well as low personal control, are variables that speak more to the experiences of disadvantaged groups system-justifying tendencies than advantaged groups; so this thesis will primarily focus on system threat as a motivating factor for system-justifying tendencies in white Americans, as a manifestation of and motivator for identity-motivated political behaviors and beliefs. Although the factors of system dependence and inescapability, low personal control, and system threat combine in influential ways that motivate working-class and especially working-class whites to vote maintain conservative ideologies (Jost 2017). Much of the political science literature discussing white

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identity politics and its relationship to the election of Donald Trump describes in some terms an element of system or "status" threat (Schildkraut 2017; Jardina 2020; Jardina 2019; Mutz 2018; Sioh 2018, Sides et al. 2018). For white Americans system threat in these terms would not only apply to the legitimacy of the political, social, economic and cultural institutions in America, but also directly to the racial hierarchy that has defined these institutions in America since its conception and has created and maintained benefits for white Americans, who in turn are motivated to reify and maintain said hierarchy (McIntosh 1988).

Mutz's previously discussed focus on the "status threat thesis" as an explanatory factor for Donald Trump's election highlights the role that status threat and system justification are playing a role in the mobilization of white identity politics. In a discussion on how white candidate selection may be motivated by status threat among whites with higher levels of racial identification, Jardina claims that whites are politically motivated by a sense of ingroup favoritism "might seek to maintain this status quo [by] supporting political candidates they view as protecting their interests and opposing those they perceive as directly challenging them..this does not mean that whites will bring their racial identity to bear on evaluations of all political candidates, but rather those that particularly appeal to or threaten whites' interests, either by way of their race, or by way the signals they send about their intent to maintain whites' status", she goes on to conclude that certain political candidates will "cue" the salience of white racial identity for some white voters (Jardina 2020, p. 7). In opposition with theories floated that lack of education was a factor determining white voter's likeliness to have voted for Trump in 2016, Mutz also found that the relationship between Trump support and perceived status threat eliminated any predictive power of education level for Trump support (Mutz 2018, p. 4337).

Status threat appears to be a powerful predictor for several manifestations of white political behavior motivated by racial identification, and its close ties to system justification theory seem to reveal that evaluating white identity politics through system justification theory could prove fruitful for growing understanding around white identity politics in America today.

Tajfel evaluates a statement from Arthur Stein about the impact an "external threat" can have on intragroup relations, discussing the circumstances under which an external threat may prompt cohesion or not. Stein writes that "the external conflict needs to invoke some threat, affect the entire group and all of its members equally and indiscriminately, and involve a solution...the group must be able to deal with the external conflict, and to provide emotional comfort and support to all its members" (p. 165). Tajfel raises important questions regarding this statement, including, most saliently for the purposes of this thesis, what about when "the consensus about threat, [when dubious], cannot be transformed by the leadership into an 'authoritatively enforced cohesion'" (Stein 1976, p. 165; Tajfel 1982, p. 15). This speaks to rifts and intragroup conflict within the group of white Americans today. If white Americans who identify strongly with their race and center their racial identity as a motivator for their political engagement perceive their advantaged racial group as "relatively deprived" (for notes on relative deprivation see section "Mobilization: from politicized identity to collective action") as compared to disadvantaged or minority racial groups as a result of racialized status threat, they do not only disagree with other white Americans who do not place such emphasis on their racial identity or center their racial identity in the same way (let alone other nonwhite Americans who experience political realities under different racial identities), but they do not share the same reality as other whites in their perceived "racial group" (Leach et al. 2007). Tactics employed by politicians like Donald Trump

or conservative political pundits may seek to address this rift in the white voter base by utilizing rhetoric designed to create more consensus amongst white Americans about status threat, and may target whites who they perceive as abandoning the group or not preserving whiteness's socially constructed value in America (Jardina 2020). Again, this is an area in which Leach et al.'s hierarchical model of in-group identification could prove useful for further analysis, as some of their supporting studies utilizing the model showed important relationships between centrality of a group identity to the ways in which an individual may perceive threat to that group, although their analysis was conducted in the context of white Dutch individuals' perceptions of threat from Muslim Dutch groups (Leach et al. 2008). Specifically the manner in which Leach et al. conceptualize guilt as a psychological threat to a group or as a threat to group image in their seventh supporting study could be very useful for replication in the American context.

Chapter 7 – Politicizing White Identity

Politicized identities are often conceived in terms of existing links between an identity and a corresponding social movement organization(s), but for the purposes of this discussion "politicized identity" will refer to the phenomenon of identity driving political behavior, be that candidate choice, policy preference, or involvement in collective action (van Zomeren 2008, p. 508, Pérez 2013). In effect, once an identity is effectively "politicized" there exists a sort of positive feedback loop between the identity itself and its increased politicization can increase the salience of the both identity itself and its politicization. How does this increased salience occur? Or what can spark this increased salience and cultivate an increased politicization of an identity, and in this case of white identity? The link between group identity and its politicization can be difficult to pin down, as the phenomenon is so context dependent and varies across types of groups and contexts; but some mechanisms of developing a politicized group consciousness tend to hold across groups. (Pérez 2013, p. 156). For a group identity to become salient there are elements of personal cognitive processes, or a sort of "readiness", combined with the "fit" of the social or political context; the interaction between these two and the placement or categorization of the self within surrounding contexts is what will motivate an individual to perceive a certain group identity they categorize themselves into as politically salient (Oakes 2002, p. 817; Simon & Klandermans 2001, p. 321). So the increased salience of white racialized identity in the U.S. today is a combination of perceptions of the self and self-categorization processes interacting with external contexts (which are in turn continually shaped by these group identity processes, amongst other factors). Political elites often activate or make salient identities, thus effectively "politicizing" latent identity attachments, and the eventual impact of this can go beyond voting

behavior into perhaps the most blatant expression of a politicized identity, which would be to engage in collective action motivated by that group identity attachment.

7.1 Role of Political Elites

The way individuals and groups perceive status threat does not occur in a vacuum, political operatives will often capitalize on perceived status threats in order to activate or make increasingly salient a group identity of a group they would like to mobilize in order to gain votes or power. Racist rhetoric is nothing novel in modern American politics (Valentino et al. 2018), but Trump may have created a politically innovative approach so to speak by not only utilizing outwardly racist rhetoric but also by using rhetoric that appealed specifically to whites' ingroup favoritism as opposed to their outgroup racial animosities (Jardina 2020, p. 5619). Donald Trump's rhetoric in which he frames entire racial groups as being pitted against one another in some competition for prestige and resources appeals to group status concerns of whites with high levels of racial identification, and even more so for whites who display a sense of white consciousness, or distinctly politicized white identity. The notion that racism is a zero-sum game (that if racism against black Americans decreases then it will increase towards white Americans) (Norton & Sommers 2011) falls well in line with Tajfel's observations about intergroup relations and conflicts, which states that positive and negative conceptions of social groups are seen as relational in nature; there are value distinctions and if one group is increasingly being perceived more positively then the "opposing" group must be facing less positive distinction (Tajfel 1982, p. 24). Social identity theory also leans on understandings of social competition in its explanatory models; the psychological component of the model relates to why individuals feel the need to engage in social competition beyond actual resource deprivation, while the system component relates to when groups may engage in social competition, and finally the societal

component relates to how social competition is expressed. Social competition is also more likely to occur if status delineations are seen as illegitimate and unstable, and in the case of a status hierarchy based on race the status delineations are obviously illegitimate, as they are socially constructed and used by white groups to oppress nonwhite groups, and unstable, as they are always changing in definition and effect (Rubin & Hewstone 2004, p. 827). Politicians like Trump then capitalize off of this sense of social competition and this view amongst whites who have high levels of racial identification that they are engaged in a zero-sum competition with other racial groups. Individual psychological processes may drive the individual to buy into this paradigm, while the context of politics in the U.S. at the moment and the structure of the systems in place cause the salience of the belief in this paradigm and willingness to engage politically based off of it for whites with high levels of white racial identification. This sort of behavior from political elites that activates these attitudes via framing and rhetoric has been analyzed in studies of ethnic conflict and ethnic political divides. In his explanation of ethnic political participation in Africa, Nelson Kasfir identifies this type of political opportunist as an ethnic entrepreneur (1979, p. 376; Horowitz 1998, p. 9). Of course this means of framing ethnic or racial conflict by political elites is not drawn from nothing, but rather from latent beliefs their target group holds but perhaps may not act on politically; the resulting process is an interaction between group identity and the creation or reinforcement of beliefs that can be weaponized politically to mobilize said group on the basis of making their racial identity more important or salient to their individual identity and stemming from this their political evaluations and behaviors (Wong & Cho 2005; Kasfir 1979, p. 376). Trump was able to activate latent racial group identity attachments for whites not only through racist rhetoric appealing to out-group resentment (he may not have amalgamated such a wide base of support if he used this sort of

rhetoric exclusively), but also through rhetoric that appealed to whites sense of ingroup favoritism. High levels of racial identification for whites predict fairly stably negative sentiments about immigration as well as a prioritization of immigration as a top concern when voting; immigration was a major policy and talking point for Trump leading up the the 2016 presidential, and he framed the issue as more than economic threat but as status threat for whites and especially working-class whites in the U.S. (Jardina 2020, p. 4426). Policy points of Trump's that went against the grain for typical Republican politicians, such as vowing to not cut spending on Social Security or Medicare, actually carried an appeal to white ingroup favoritism. While welfare programs have been depicted via media representation and political rhetoric as being associated with black Americans, Social Security and Medicare have been traditionally tied to whiteness by these systems (Winter 2006; Jardina 2020 p. 5117). Activating whites who have high levels of white identification has created an evident voting bloc of white voters who will turn out to vote in support of candidates that appeal to their sentiments of ingroup favoritism. The danger of this mechanism working for Trump is that he has shown other politicians that they too can capitalize off of attitudes linked to white ingroup favoritism; it can be done even without being explicitly racist, all while managing to create voting blocs that further exacerbate division in the U.S. and prevent egalitarian policy and social justice from being reached.

7.2 Mobilization: from Politicized Identity to Collective Action

Further utility of social identity theory and system justification theory specifically as a means of examining white identity politics and its ramifications is seen in its explanatory power for collective action. The phenomena of status threat and relative deprivation, which are either directly referenced or indirectly conceptually reflected in different terminology in much of the political science literature on white identity politics, can spur white collective action based on a

sort of group psychological self-defense in which white Americans see themselves in opposition with nonwhite groups in the U.S. (Mutz 2018; Leach et al. 2007; Jardina 2020; Wilkins et al. 2016; Craig & Richeson 2014; Wilkins & Kaiser 2013; Craig & Richeson 2014)).

Martijn van Zomeren, Tom Postmes, and Russell Spears' Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) most successfully integrates the three primary socio-psychological variables viewed as powerful predictors of collective action: subjective perceptions and feelings of injustice, efficacy and identity (van Zomeren 2008). A primary focus of socio-psychological conceptions of collective action and of these variables in particular is the distinction between objective, material injustice and subjective perceptions of injustice (in fact van Zomeren et al. clarify that subjective feelings about inequality take precedence as more powerful predictors of collective action that objective conditions), and it is partly due to this distinction that SIMCA is such a useful approach for understanding reactionary mobilization based on white identity (2008, p. 505). Ultimately the innovation provided by SIMCA and its conception of collective action predictors is that van Zomeren et al. show social identity to be a moderating variable for efficacy and injustice, as in social identity itself impacts and shapes group perceptions of injustice and efficacy (via shaping perceptions about how the group ay stand in relation to institutions and systems in place), and therefore their explanatory power for collective action is mediated by social identity itself, which also has direct predictive power for collective identity as its own variable. So, identity's power as a variable is twofold in its both direct and indirect predictive functions for collective action (2008 p. 511).

System justification theory interacts with SIMCA's explanatory variables to further clarify how and why whites may be organizing politically and engaging in or supporting collective on the basis of white racial identification in the modern context. As established, system justifying beliefs and system-defending action can oft be prompted by status threat (Mutz 2018; Wilkins et al. 2013; Wilkins & Kaiser 2014; Scheepers et al. 2009). In the case of perceived status threat that white Americans are experiencing, researchers have found that even priming white research subjects with information about racial progress for minorities or discussions around shifting demographics in the United States is often enough to trigger a self-defensive response from white subjects in which they may perceive higher levels of threat to their social status, or position as the ingroup with hegemonic power in the U.S. (Norton & Sommers 2011; Wilkins & Kaiser 2014; Wilkins et al. 2013). For ingroups, system justifying or system legitimizing beliefs are linked to maintaining or boosting self and group esteem (as opposed to the opposite correlation that occurs with outgroups who maintain system-justifying or system-legitimizing beliefs, who experience a decrease in self and group esteem at the cost of rationalizing that the systems they live under aren't so harmful towards or antithetical to their very identities) (Jost & Banaji 1994; Jost et al. 2004). And beyond motivations for bolstering or maintaining high self-esteem and high constructed value of a social status group, whites have a material interest in investing in system justifying beliefs as well; Sioh writes, "...identity battles feature so prominently in political battles that showcase ostensibly economic contests such as the Trump supporters in the US and Brexit supporters in Britain…[because]...social compacts, which are relational and involve group identity, are embedded in the distribution of material rewards" (2018, p. 115). System-justifying beliefs, quite logically, also go hand-in-hand with conservatism (in its more traditional and universal understanding as an ideology resistant to system-change),

and in the modern U.S. context, perceived group threat on behalf of whites tends to spark system-legitimizing sentiments and shifts towards Republican conservatism (Craig & Richeson 2014, p. 1195). The key aspect of status threat as a mobilizing factor for white engagement in conservative, racialized political action is that it partially stems from a psychological attachment to preserving high social status of the ingroup via ingroup favoritism, and status threat, sparked by demographic changes or perceived racial progress, often manifests in whites experiencing subjective feelings of relative deprivation as compared to minority groups (Leach et al. 2007).

The relative deprivation theory combines sentiments from the "left-behind" thesis, which sought to explain Trump's 2016 election through a purely economic lens and claimed that white working class voters opted for Trump out of economic anxiety, with social identity theory. In different terms this has been expressed in the political science literature as many researchers in the field analyzing the 2016 presidential concluded that it was racialized economic anxiety, not only economic anxiety, that was shown to have predictive power for Trump votes. System justification theory also provides a valuable lens through which white working-class voting behavior can be understood; a perennial question undoubtedly arises around working class voters in general who cast ballots for conservative parties whose economic policies will serve to harm more than benefit the working class. When analyzed through the lens of system justification theory, which primarily developed to further understanding around why individuals or groups will vote against their own interests, the drift of the working class and specifically the white working class towards conservatism becomes more clear (Jost 2017). For the white working class especially, maintaining a positive group image in order to maintain self-esteem can be achieved through identifying primarily with one's racial identity, as presenting as white in the

U.S. certainly still to this day provides benefits and privileges, as opposed to identifying with one's socioeconomic status. Furthermore, conceptions of relative disadvantage amongst whites captures the importance of evaluating ingroup favoritism as opposed to only outgroup attitudes amongst whites in order to understand white identity politics (a key distinction Jardina makes in all of her work on white identity politics). This frame of thinking then can help further elucidate reactionary collective action from white organizers who oppose the Black Lives Matter movement or speak out against affirmative action (Renfro et al. 2006; Osborne et al. 2019). Structurally advantaged groups face less barriers to engaging in collective action; they often have access to more resources and generally have a stronger sense of efficacy, or "sense of control, influence, strength, and effectiveness to change a group-related problem" (van Zomeren 2008, p. 513). Salience of a group identity can increase when the group finds they have the ability to successfully act collectively on behalf of the group, and because whites are an objectively advantaged group in the U.S., they also enjoy a greater sense of perceived efficacy and trust that their actions can effect change upon the systems they live under (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Osborne et al. 2017, p. 246).

Although in their studies on system-defending and system-challenging collective action, Osborne et al. found that for both disadvantaged and advantaged groups that political efficacy was not a strong predictor of system-defending action; they conclude that this could be due to the fact that "once group-based inequalities are firmly in place, little personal effort is needed to maintain them" and borrow a succinct term from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva to describe a society that maintains "racism without racists" in which "the perpetuation of the status quo merely requires the absence of active intervention" (Osborne et al. 2017, p. 263). The reason whites in the U.S.

may feel called to action due to recent status threats is that they perceive system-defense as no longer being something they can maintain passively, and feel motivated to organize action in order to defend their place atop the status hierarchy. And yet again the prominence of ingroup attitudes for whites becomes clear when considering this notion of a racist society functioning "without racists" when racism can be understood as manifesting through behaviors that stem from ingroup favoritism as opposed to outgroup resentment (not to claim that white outgroup resentment towards black people does not exist in modern America, as it most certainly does; however, understandings of reactionary white movements protesting government redress towards black Americans can certainly benefit from an analysis of white ingroup favoritism as opposed to an analysis of white outgroup attitudes) (Jardina 2020).

Relative deprivation theory concerns evaluations about one's disadvantage as compared to other groups in society; in their study "Angry opposition to government redress: When the structurally advantaged perceive themselves as relatively deprived" Leach et al. analyze this phenomenon in Australia and capture white anger and white outgroup attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples as opposed to conducting an evaluation of anger connected to white ingroup attitudes (2007, p. 191). However, some sort of evaluation comparing relative advantage or disadvantage certainly implies a sense of ingroup identification, one strong enough that an individual will make sense of their own situation and contexts through the lens of their group identity and the comparisons they make between their own group and outgroups. Leach et al. found that measures of racists attitudes predicted notions of relative deprivation amongst white Australians that fed into feelings of anger, which in turn motivated white collective action opposing government redress to Aborigines (2007, p. 200). In an eerie parallel to the populist Trumpism thriving in the U.S.

today, Leach et al. identify that "the notion of inverted relative deprivation may help to explain the continued appeal of political movements that are fiercely anti-government and anti-outgroup", and even make a note regarding the impossibility of a "shared reality" between different racial groups in a country if objectively advantaged ingroups evaluate themselves as relatively disadvantaged compared to objectively disadvantaged minority outgroups (2007, p. 202). This notion of a loss of "shared reality" has been reflected in the fragmentation of American political media along partisan lines, but perhaps the dissonance between "truths" for each political camp can also be traced beyond media effects to the psychological processes outlined by relative deprivation theory (Davis & Dunaway 2016).An older study of this phenomenon in the context of the white working class in the United States analyzed feelings of relative deprivation, finding that relative deprivation theory pinpointed the junction of economic anxiety and racial anxiety from members of the white working class who were particularly concerned with how they perceived their ingroup to be performing economically as opposed to the outgroup, black Americans, as opposed to utilizing perceptions about their individual economic success when making comparisons to others in their own group or the outgroup (Vanneman & Pettigrew 1972). This is the same sentiment captured in Sides et al.'s picture of the 2016 election and explanation of white America voted the way it did; "relative deprivation" was conceptualized as racialized economic anxiety but was about group comparisons as opposed to evaluations based on individualistic comparisons nonetheless (2018). While Leach et al. consider the effect relative deprivation may have on collective action, it's clear that it can be a useful means of analyzing candidate choice as well. In more recent work, Pettigrew revisited the relative deprivation thesis, attributing relative deprivation as a socio-psychological attribute of white Trump voters in 2016 (Pettigrew 2017, p. 110). Relative deprivation theory appears to

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have some explanatory power for the phenomenon of white voters who are not financially unstable or out of work expressing racialized economic anxiety (Mutz 2018; Sides et al. 2018); the real issue is less of about the reality of their financial situation and more about group status comparisons and concerns.

Chapter 8 – Moving Forward: Recommendations from Social Psychology for Mitigating the Consequences of Politicized White Identity

This thesis by and large abides by the logic proffered from social psychology that humans fulfill psychological needs of forming a positive identity, cultivating a sense of belonging, and developing a sense of distinctiveness from others by placing value in various group identities (Tajfel 1982; Brewer & Pickett 1999, p. 83). From this purview, while the groups and the group distinctions themselves are primarily socially constructed, the psychological processes by which individuals come to value their group identity and behave in a manner that will support that group's positive image, and thereby support the individuals own self-esteem, are a function of human nature that cannot be ignored in understandings of political science (Horowitz 1998; Pettigrew 2017). The crux of the issue in the context of modern global politics, and the U.S. specifically, is that while for minority or disadvantaged groups engaging in identity politics is a means of asserting the legitimacy of one's identity under oppressive systems, and asserting that one must be treated justly under said systems, for dominant groups in society, engaging in identity politics often comes from a place anxiety and fear over losing hegemonic power and privileges under systems built to oppress outgroups, and leads to reactionary movements against progressive policies that aim to bring about greater equality for all members of society. Critics of identity politics cite concern for more divisive societies around the world if progressive identity politics that disadvantaged groups are engaging in continue, claiming that it incites the reactionary responses from white suremacist groups who engage in white identity politics (albeit the very much louder variety of identity politics than is described throughout most of this thesis) (Walters 2018). The mistake here is in lumping the identity politics disadvantaged groups engage in with the sort that advantaged groups engage in in terms of ramifications; and yet, the

inclination to engage in identity politics can be traced back to the same psychological processes for both advantaged and disadvantaged groups. This makes solving the "problem", so to speak, of white identity politics more complicated.

8.1 Coexistence of Politics of Redistribution and Politics of Recognition

Many progressive and leftist critiques of identity politics consider identity politics as a framework to be a roadblock to the politics of redistribution; the notion that divisions along racial or gendered lines aren't conductive to class solidarity is the essence of this argument. (Lilla 2016, Walters 2018). However, the "politics of redistribution" and the "politics of recognition" do not have to exist on such a binary scale and are not necessarily antithetical to one another (Fraser 1998, p.73). In ethnically divided societies, the process of peaceful democratization is helped along by creating or investing in policy interests that can cut across ethnic lines; the greater number of issues that fall into the same divisions as ethnicity then the more politicized one's ethnic identity becomes. However, if ethnic identification cannot serve as a cue for so many policy issue topics, then ethnic identity can be de-politicized in a sense (Horowitz 1998; Simon & Klandermans 2001). To pursue justice wholly on the political and economic axis of redistributive politics while ignoring identity recognition, or to pursue justice wholly on the cultural and social axis of recognition while ignoring redistributive politics, would be reductive (Fraser 1998). As has become so commonplace a phrase that its own strength has begun to undercut itself, the solution exists (partly) at the intersections. Intersectional approaches emphasize the manner in which one's class identity, racial identity, sexual orientation, gender identity and so on interact to place an individual at a particular crossroads, ensnared in a particular set of binds imposed by the institutions and systems under which they live, and most essentially to this thesis, as members of various groups which interact with these systems

differently (Crenshaw 1991). The intersections are where various group interests can collide and understandings from social psychology can provide potential for increased understanding around why certain group identities become more politicized for an individual. For example, for white working-class women, what group identity will become the most important or salient to her as she selects the candidate she will vote for in the upcoming presidential election? Of course this is only one aspect of understanding her vote choice, but it's an important one. In choosing to vote for Trump she may be voting against her own economic interests and her interests as a woman, but casting a ballot that upholds her sense of self-esteem and positive image of herself, if she identifies strongly with whiteness, and perhaps, in particular, conceptions of white womanhood (Junn 2017). Different contexts may make salient for her different aspects of her identity to engage politically from.

The combined politics of redistribution and recognition require most essentially historical context to be taken into account; in her work on the topic Nancy Fraser suggests that "recognition is a remedy for injustice, not a generic human need", and can take the shape of recognizing both common humanity as well as recognizing difference (1998, p. 80). While social psychology argues that all individuals require a sense of "distinctiveness" and that this in part motivates their need to belong to exclusive groups (Tajfel 1982), Fraser here refers to a formal institutionalized effort of recognition as opposed to this more informal psychological need for distinction (1998). Fraser's emphasis on historical context then makes more apparent how and why identity politics, or the politics of recognition, are an appropriate place from which to address injustices done to a historically oppressed group in a country, or black Americans and other oppressed groups in the U.S. context, while maintaining that, for white Americans,

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engaging in white identity politics creates an issue because it is not "a need" for a group that has historically maintained and currently maintains hegemonic power in the country. Following from this logic, liberal democracy can and should have a place for identity politics practiced by non-dominant groups that stem from a need for recognition within and redress from the political system. Differences of mutually agreed upon constructed meaning behind non-dominant group identity can create contestation within the group about which voices are "authentic" (for example think in current dialogue around the Black Lives Matter movement which black voices may be viewed as sufficiently "authentic"); this can result in gate-keeping within the group, and yet as all group identities maintain elements of exclusivity and distinctiveness, this is no new phenomenon and social psychology can also lend useful interpretations of this phenomenon (Philips 1994, p.83). The challenge is in tampering the negative effects of reactionary identitarian movements from dominant groups.

8.2 Recategorization and Decategorization Solutions

From a social psychology perspective, solutions to intergroup conflicts, and in this case a conflict in which a structurally advantaged group maintains hegemonic power over a structurally disadvantaged group, must be addressed with the psychological processes that create the need for group identification in mind. Group categorization processes are taken into account, as these are the mechanisms through which individuals self-categorize into their group identities (Turner & Reynolds 2012; Huddy 2002; Leach et al. 2007). Following from this, solutions have traditionally focused on either decategorization or recategorization processes that can be encouraged at the personal and institutional level (Gaertner 1993; Brewer 1997). Decategorization draws on the contact-theory, which proposes that if members from the ingroup have more contact with outgroup members then they will no longer subscribe to stereotypes

about outgroup members, and via interpersonal contact will de-escalate conflict and create a more equal society (Brewer 1997). Recategorization, on the other hand, leans on the same concepts that bore Gaertner et al.'s Common Ingroup Identity Model, and aims to de-escalate intergroup conflict or achieve equality by developing a group identity that is inclusive of both ingroup and outgroup, hence creating a new category altogether (Gaertner 1993; Brewer 1997; Transue 2007, p. 89). In her paper on social psychology's means of informing policy-making, Marilynn Brewer supports the integration of both processes to work towards equality in the U.S., asking that people stop conceptualizing assimilation and multiculturalism as two opposing poles and think instead of how decategorization and recategorization efforts and pluralism can be "creatively combined" to create better outcomes for social justice (1997, p. 208). Brewer also mirrors some of Fraser's sentiments in arguing that "...affirmative action policies...can be understood not as group entitlements but as reasoned mechanisms for reducing the historically cumulated correlations between demographic identities and economic and political role identities in our society" (1997, p. 209). Again the focus on historical context, and the historical correlation between racial identity and economic and political "role" (or denial thereof) in the U.S., is emphasized as key. The catch is that the depoliticization of racial identity requires not only aggressive redistributive policy but also reparations for black Americans (Winant 1994, p. 45). So, depoliticization of racial identity will, ironically, first require heightened politicization of identity in order to achieve a just status quo.

Both decategorization and recategorization processes have pitfalls and can be implemented in ways that are more harmful than helpful to de-escalating tension, redressing wrongs against black Americans, and achieving social justice. The contact-theory, which relies on the idea that

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increased interpersonal contact between white and black Americans will cause white Americans to stop considering black Americans as an outgroup, does little to address issues of institutionalized racism head-on. Also, as this thesis argues, the negative effects of white identity politics do not only stem from whites' negative outgroup attitudes towards nonwhite Americans, but also in whites' ingroup favoritism. Decategorization as a concept can also fall into the "color-blind" racial paradigm, a popular post-Jim Crow "racial ideology", that whiteness studies researcher Eduardo Bonilla-Silva conceptualizes via its increasingly "covert" racist rhetoric, general avoidance of racial terminology and increasing claims of "reverse racism" from whites, the "invisibility of [mechanisms]" that serve to reify systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003, p. 272). Essentially color-blind racism is a dialectic in which acknowledging race is viewed as antithetical to a liberal society in which all people are treated "equally", and yet this rhetoric only serves to uphold systemic racism while labeling any efforts to address racial issues as taboo. The color-blind racial paradigm creates the same outcomes that Jim Crow era racism produced, but more surreptitiously; and in effect protects its own racist practices from reproach under the guise that "seeing color" makes an individual racist; the two key elements of this racial paradigm are not only the minimization of racism but also a focus on individuality and meritocracy (Drakulitch et al. 2020, p. 374). Color-blind racism ignores social realities that black and other nonwhite Americans face and equally ignores the historical contexts that have shaped the modern systems under which Americans live, and under this racial paradigm, racism is primarily considered as manifesting in interpersonal acts of hate or animosity as opposed to existing at the systemic level. Arguably, the degree to which identity politics are being practiced today by black organizers in the U.S. is a reaction to this color-blind racist ideology, which ignored difference

and peddled the idea that America was "beyond race" (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Gallagher 2003; Drakulitch et al. 2020).

On the other hand, the recategorization approach has its dangers as well. Recategorization would imply the creation of a new larger category that encompasses all racial groups, in the U.S. context this would be an "American" identity (Brewer 1997). The manifestations of this approach can range from the sort of color-blind rhetoric discussed above or in more apparent racist classifications that may exclude or demonize immigrant groups and nonwhites among others. A core tenet of populist rhetoric is a distinction about who the "real" members of the nation are, and in the case of far-right American populism today, the brand of populism embodied in Trump's dialogue, the "symbolic" or constructed group of "real" Americans implies white and Christian (Müller 2017, p. 24). The question that arises from a process of intended recategorization is ultimately, who is conducting the reconstruction or creation of a new category? Surely, there is a way to conceptualize "American" as a larger identity category in a way that is inclusive yet doesn't minimize difference or ignore racism in favor of more color-blind rhetoric, and yet many of the politicians and media pundits who are setting the discourse around American identity are not conducting the conversation around categorization in this manner. Finally, a third issue that emerges from mediating these approaches, touched on above in the terms of politicized and depoliticized identities, is that social psychology recognizes the importance of recognition of group identity, but also warns that the politicization of these identities reifies even stricter distinctions between groups and institutionalizes their differences in a manner that often only creates a more divided society. Reconciling these two truths in a political context is challenging; Brewer recommends that "...the key is to capitalize more

effectively on our capacity for multiple social identities" (1997, p. 208). By this, she is referencing a concept often discussed in literature on ethnocentrism and ethnically divided newer democracies, that by tapping on or emphasizing issues that cut across ethnic or identitarian lines, that is creating cross-identitarian coalitions on issues, then ethnic or racial identity can become increasingly depoliticized (Rabushka & Shepsle 1972, p. 57; Horowitz 1998).

This is a challenge though, as many politicians find success appealing to homogenous groups along racial lines (Horowitz 1998, p. 29). In the context of the U.S., politicians (especially at the state or national level as opposed to municipal) in both the Democratic and Republican party have often been able to ignore appealing to nonwhite voters altogether, or treated nonwhite voters as an afterthought in their campaigning efforts, considering that whites have constituted the largest racial group in the country and have historically had the highest voter turnout rates (McDonald 2020). Historically there has been a tradition of disenfranchising black voters rather than attempting to include them in a political coalition or voting bloc, and attention has been called recently to modern methods of voter suppression and disenfranchisement happening today in the U.S. (Epperly et al. 2020). Nonetheless, every individual has a variety of group identities, ranging from those, while socially constructed, assigned at birth, such as race or gender, to group identities individuals have, at least some autonomy, to select for themselves such as professional group. Different contexts will make salient for an individual different group identifications they maintain, and fruitful ground moving forward in U.S. politics may be creating cross-racial coalitions based on redistributive politics. However, this cannot be achieved whilst other aspects of identity are ignored, an intersectional approach will remain of paramount importance; history has shown that a class-based approach that ignores other intersections of identity such as race,

gender, and sexuality will only uphold and reify the oppressive systems that are so intertwined

with the roots of economic injustice and wealth and income disparities (Crenshaw 1991; Fraser

1999; Fraser 2014, p. 550). A cross-cleavage class coalition will not be successful unless politics

of recognition are practiced alongside the politics of redistribution, and this involves taking

seriously the action necessary to include black Americans as a part of this reconstructed

collective identity by addressing concerns specific to black Americans alongside concerns

specific to working-class and poor Americans. While creating a new group identity via creating a

new class coalition certainly exists in tension with creating policy that stops ignoring the plight

of black Americans, because policies that specifically target particular racial groups do serve to

reify and make salient these racial group distinctions, recent American history has revealed that

it does not serve well to ignore these distinctions while attempting to build more inclusive

coalitions aimed at securing more redistributive economic policy.

8.3 Framing Recategorization

Framing will be an essential issue when creating new cross-cleavage coalitions that could

potentially work to diminish political cleavages falling along racial lines. Previous research has

suggested that whites with lower levels of racial identification who are taught or recognize that

as an advantaged group they enjoy unearned privileges are more likely to support policies that

"reduce their relative power" compared to disadvantaged groups (Jardina 2020, p. 7056; Schmitt

et al. 2003). But Jardina contends that because whites who express high levels of racial

identification have an awareness of their privileges as a group, but do not perceive them as being

unfair but earned, many whites will not be receptive to this frame or to an appeal to

egalitarianism (2020, p. 7167). A quality of white racial consciousness is viewing racial

disparities as a zero-sum game in which racial progress will come at the expense of whites'

power or resources, so instead Jardina suggests that the necessary frame to appeal to whites who are politically motivated by their racial identification to create new coalitions that cut across racial lines will be to emphasize that racial progress does not necessitate a loss for whites. Jardina's claim about frames partially works; indeed the "white privilege is unearned and unfair" frame does not seem to convince whites with higher levels of racial identification. However, whites will have to accept a loss of power and a loss of privilege in order to achieve true egalitarianism and social justice for all racial groups in the U.S.; while this certainly does not entail a zero-sum game in which one group must be "loser" if the other is "winner", it does entail a genuine release of power, or perceived power for whites. And yet, the tradeoff could be a real improvement of the material conditions for poor and working-class whites. This could serve as not only an appeal to the self-interest of poor and working-class whites but also to their group identity interests if the creation of a new coalition is successful. And yet, minimal group experiments, while perhaps unable to hold-up in the complexities of real-world context, do suggest that ingroup members will sacrifice self-interest in order to maximize "ingroup-favoring" differences between the ingroup and the outgroup, or in this case between white Americans and nonwhite or black Americans (Tajfel 1982, p. 26). This reveals the power of positive distinction and how essential it appears to be for some individuals as a means of motivating their identification with a dominant group. If the solution is to create a new category that includes members of various racial groups in order to achieve redistributive policy in the U.S., it appears that this will not be an easy path. And yet, creating common political aims and interests that cut across racial lines feels more imperative than ever in the U.S. in light of levels of division along identitarian lines.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

The ramifications of white identity politics recently observed in U.S. politics, most visible in events such as the election of Donald Trump, continue to be a polarizing and destructive force in American politics. This thesis has shown the usefulness of social psychology theory, specifically social identity and system justification theories to understanding the politicization of white identity and the subsequent political outcomes. Capturing the concept of identity, let alone its politicization, is a challenging task in and of itself, but it is necessary to capture the processes of identity formation and politicization with as much nuance as possible in order to parse out their effects; this is another issue that methodology from social psychology can assist political science research with, as political science as a field is generally utilizing less developed models and measures to capture identity in comparison. Most importantly this thesis proposes that these theories can inform potential solutions for mitigating the harmful effects that white identity politics have on the progressive and egalitarian aims of democracy and in this case, the American political project. Specifically the creation of new group categories which cut across racial lines and create political coalitions that contain members of all racial identifications may be a key strategy moving forward to decrease intergroup racial conflict and achieve more progressive economic policies that don't leave behind black Americans. This thesis maintains that identity politics practiced by non-dominant groups can be necessary to liberal democracies when they maintain structures and systems that oppress non-dominant groups.

Future research should aim for a more intersectional analysis of white identity politics, evaluating for example, in the particular context of the modern U.S. how class or gender identities interact with white racial identity and what impact these interactions have on political

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behavior motivated by white racialized identity. There is no simple way forward to ease racialized political polarization in the U.S., but understanding the psychological motivations behind behaviors that drive this division and allowing these understandings to inform political science's analysis of the problem is a first step. Finally, the implications of applying social identity and system justification theories to white identity politics in the U.S. can certainly increase understandings of white identity politics in other contexts where similar rhetoric is being employed from political elites, or where white groups may be perceiving increasing immigration or shifting demographics as a threat to group status. Integrating understandings of the social psychology of group identity attachments with understandings from political science can elucidate concerns about reactionary white identity political movements in a variety of contexts around the world.

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