White Identity and Black Lives Matter: Amending and Defending Privilege in the Wake of the 2020 Uprising[*]

Geneva Cole [†]

genevacole@uchicago.edu

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Abstract

Whiteness is an increasingly consequential social identification in the United States, but existing work has failed to analyze the variation in how this identity presents and what it means for political engagement and opinions. This paper makes a conceptual contribution by developing a typology of white identification that captures variation across salience of white identity and affect towards whiteness. The resultant three types of white identification—racial agnostics, racial preservationists, and racial reconstructionists—are broad but useful patterns for understanding how white Americans think about racial politics and specifically Black Lives Matter. Using two rounds of in-depth interviews from the Minneapolis-St.Paul metropolitan area in Minnesota, this paper presents preliminary qualitative evidence for how these types shape racial attitudes before and after the large scale protests for racial justice following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Introduction

After George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, protests against police violence erupted first in Minnesota and then nationwide. After years of police killings of unarmed Black Americans, it seemed like the nation had reached a breaking point. Black

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Lives Matter protests were visible in big cities and small towns, supported by a multi-racial coalition of protesters. The activism was also accompanied by a groundswell of demand for information about racism, anti-racism, and white privilege in the United States. Many white Americans, wanting to be more informed, bought *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo to the point that it was back-ordered at major booksellers. Entertainment platforms also bought into the moment, making "Black stories" highlights to help customers find movies, shows, and documentaries made by, for, and about Black people. Even so, movies like *The Help* and *The Blind Side*, stories about race that center whiteness and play into tropes of white saviorism, saw massive spikes in viewership. This highlights one piece of contemporary white identity politics in the United States: a growing awareness of whiteness and its inherent privilege that is in many ways still met with a white-centered search for understanding.

The other, perhaps more visible manifestation of white identity politics in the U.S. is centered around maintaining the status quo. In response to George Floyd's death and calls for Black lives to matter in concrete ways, this vocal counter-movement organized around the slogans "All Lives Matter" and "Back the Blue." At times, this movement operated with coded language meant to elicit fear of racial others disguised by calls for law and order. Other times, it is more explicitly concerned with white racial fears. This form of white identity politics is concerned with protecting the status of whites in the United States, especially after the implicit threat of Barack Obama's historic administration.

These two concurrent movements highlight qualitative differences in patterns of white identity awareness now prominent in American politics. While the study of white identity is growing, this paper argues that the nature of white racial identity is more varied and complex than previously recorded. The paper proceeds as follows. First, I review the literature on racial attitudes and identity politics in the united states and present a theory of white identity that builds on recent work while encompassing a broader and more variable understanding of patterns of white identification. This theory suggests that there are three broad

but identifiable patterns of white identity that differ in their content and consequences for American Politics. I then outline the case selection of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area in Minnesota as a site for researching white racial identity, a location that is uniquely relevant for discussions of inter-group attitudes in 2020 as the city that sparked nationwide protests against police brutality. Next, I outline my data and qualitative analytic choices for empirically testing how types of white identification shape attitudes about the Movement for Black lives using a total of 61 interviews that took place during two periods in spring and summer 2020, which provides leverage for analyzing the effects of the racial uprising on white identity. I follow this with qualitative evidence that supports my theory of white identification types—racial agnostics, racial preservationists, and racial reconstructionists—and demonstrates how patterns of white identification shape the way white Americans understand and engage with racial politics. Finally, I conclude with suggestions for quantitatively testing these findings for broader population-level inferences.

White Racial Attitudes

Much of the literature on race and public opinion in American politics focuses on the attitudes and behaviors of white Americans. This literature is primarily focused on how voting behavior and attitudes about racial policies are shaped by whites' out-group attitudes, especially their attitudes about Black Americans. Racial resentment, or symbolic racism, is a common way for social scientists to measure white attitudes that are rooted in anti-black affect covered with the guise of moral traditionalism (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). Instead of being overtly racist based on phenotypical attributes, racial resentment couches racial difference in terms of symbolic and moral principles, allowing whites to express racial animus without being explicitly racist (Kinder and Sears, 1981). This operationalization of racial attitudes has long been predictive of American's views toward the welfare state, affirmative

action, and other racialized public policies (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). A growing number of racial others, or out-groups, due to globalization and demographic change is associated with growing levels of ethnocentrism in American public opinion, with especially consequential impacts in the realm of foreign policy and immigration (Kinder and Kam, 2009).

The study of racial attitudes in American politics proliferated with the ascension of Barack Obama as many demonstrated that his presence on the national political stage made race "chronically salient" for Americans. This was particularly true among Democrats and independents (Tesler and Sears, 2010). His presence as a public figure made race chronically accessible to white voters to the point that racial considerations spilled over into nonracial policy realms such as health care (Knowles et al., 2010; Tesler, 2015; Luttig and Callaghan, 2016). Still others suggest that these attitudes have been steadily increasing in prominence and significance since the late 1980s for evaluations of parties, candidates, and government services (Enders and Scott, 2018). This is consistent with the narrative that the two major parties underwent a realignment on primarily racial grounds throughout the twentieth century, giving us racialized presidential politics with the "Southern Strategy" the Willie Horton Ad (Mendelberg, 1997). However, much of this racialization was thought to be discreet, using dog-whistles and coded language to distance white Americans from their complicity in racism (Mendelberg, 2001; Haney-López, 2014).

While most literature focuses on white out-group attitudes, there is growing evidence that white in-group attitudes are also consequential for American politics. This was not always thought to be the case: while there is strong evidence of in-group attitudes among Black Americans, white racial identity is usually considered invisible or taken for granted and conditioned on context (Dawson, 1994; McDermott and Samson, 2005). Previous work on measuring white identity found that it led to warmer feelings towards the in-group rather than cooler feelings towards out-groups, but with limited effects "due to the fact that whites' group interest [was] not activated."(Wong and Cho, 2005). More recent investigations find

evidence that white identity is now activated and in fact politicized into a white consciousness due to demographic changes and feelings of vulnerability about the instability of the racial hierarchy (Jardina, 2019). This politicized white identity is politically consequential for evaluations of candidates of color and attitudes about immigration, but also for opinions about things like medicare and social security that are perceived to support the in-group (Jardina, 2020). This work is incredibly important for establishing that white racial identity exists and is consequential for American politics, particularly as it pertains to voting behavior and social policies. However, while the proof of concept is clear, there is evidence that white identity operates in different ways for certain subsets of the in-group (Cole, 2020).

A Theory of White Identification

In 1981, Robert Terry wrote "to be white in America is to not have to think about it" (Terry, 1981). Scholars have demonstrated that this assessment no longer holds for American politics in the contemporary era (Jardina, 2019; Cole, 2020). Jardina's work was groundbreaking in providing a proof of concept for white racial identity and white group consciousness at the population level and demonstrating its growing import for contemporary politics. However, it is possible that this work understates the importance of white identity for American politics by not differentiating between the contrasting patterns of white identification. In this research, "most of the whites who possess high levels of white identity ... are not racially conscious in a way that is intended to promote greater racial equality." (Jardina, 2019, p. 48). Furthermore, "most white identifiers embrace their privileged status" (p. 134). This is consistent with a type of white identification that operates in a specific way, to uphold and defend the privileges that come with being white.

Historically, race consciousness among whites is thought to be tied to growing class consciousness and contrast between whites and varying groups of others. Low-wage whites

Table 1: Typology of White Identity

Type	Pattern of Identification
Racial Agnostic	Not racially conscious and does not comprehend privileges
Racial Preservationist	Racially conscious with desire to defend privileges
Racial Reconstructionist	Racially conscious with desire to amend privileges

were bestowed "psychological wages" by their race that allowed them to feel superior to black low-wage workers (Roediger, 2007). The groups of others vary throughout history—the Irish were not originally considered white until they used racial violence to distinguish themselves from poor blacks, thus enabling their assimilation into whiteness (Ignatiev, 1994). Class conflict between whites after the abolition of slavery was assuaged through this distinction in order to "transfer class hatred so it fell upon the black worker" instead of being directed at wealthy capitalist whites (Marx, 1998, p. 138). The boundaries of whiteness, while contested, have largely allowed for assimilation for European immigrants by virtue of of institutions like the census which classified these groups as white and reinforced their status relative to groups like Blacks, Asians, and Mexicans (Fox and Guglielmo, 2012).

The theoretical framework presented here is based on qualitative fieldwork aiming to address two primary questions: how do white Americans understand their racial identity, and what effect does this have on politics writ large? Based on exploratory fieldwork, I present a framework that allows for both variation in patterns of white identification and change due to personal and/or external circumstance. I argue that there are three different kinds of white identification that are distinct in both their content and consequences for how white Americans understand and engage with politics. These three types differ by relative salience or recognition of whiteness, and by valence of white identity.

The first type of white identification is consistent with previous literature in political science that finds whiteness an unimportant political identity. I label this type *racial agnostic* because these identifiers do not recognize their whiteness as an important personal attribute and can range from skeptical of white identity to oblivious. Returning to Jardina

(2019), racial agnostics may or may not be white identifiers but they certainly do not have a developed white consciousness. But this also doesn't mean that their perceptions of race don't affect their approach to politics: while these identifiers might believe themselves above the fray of identity politics, they are perhaps more likely to embrace doc whistles and implicit racism that enable them to keep their distance.

The second type of white identification is characterized by a recognition of whiteness that is associated with grievance and perceiving whiteness as under attack. I label this type *racial preservationist* because these identifiers have white consciousness that is concerned with maintaining their privilege and protecting the status quo. Racial preservationists are close to Jardina's white conscious Americans who want to ensure benefits for white people as a group by working together. This group is especially likely to associate their whiteness with a sense of grievance, understanding their skin color as something that limits their privileges rather then enabling them, especially in the context of jobs and economic opportunity. At times, they can express support for or superficial solidarity with people of color, but still feel that they are unfairly treated by virtue of being white.

The third type of white identification is characterized by a recognition of whiteness and understanding of privilege. I label this type *racial reconstructionist* because these whites acknowledge the inequalities perpetuated by white privilege and feel either a sense of guilt or an active desire to change it by engaging in a kind of third reconstruction. Racial reconstructionists have white consciousness with a different valence than that of racial preservationists—they associate whiteness with a sense of guilt and at times seek to amend the status quo.

These three types of identification are not monolithic but rather broad categories of identification patterns. These patterns effectively vary on two dimensions: the first being salience or recognition of whiteness, and the second being affect towards whiteness and its inherent privileges. Figure 1 illustrates where the archetypal agnostic, preservationist,

Figure 1: Patterns of White Identification
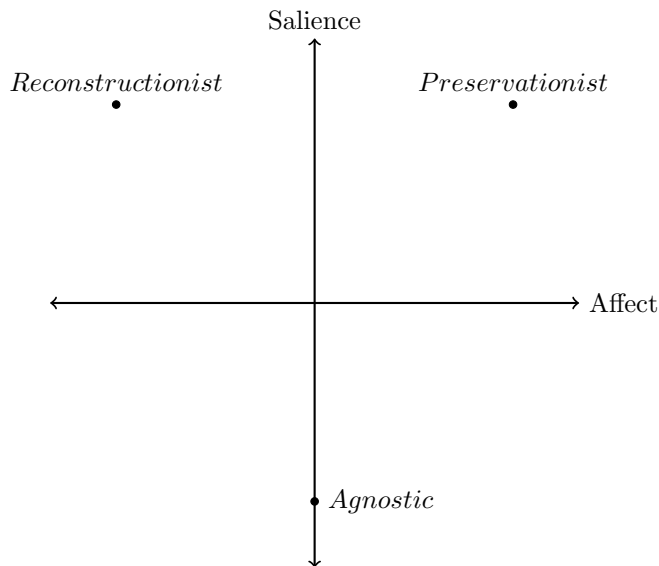
and reconstructionist would fall across these planes. However, my theory allows for the fact that individuals are complex and can change. I argue that racial agnostics can be activated into a sense of consciousness by encounters with diversity or occasions when they are confronted with their own race, which helps them develop into racial preservationists or racial reconstructionists. This can be both from a national trend, like demographic changes, or a more personal experience in a classroom or witnessing a protest for racial justice like those following the death of George Floyd. In response to these same kinds of events, reconstructionists and preservationists may become more strongly identified with their type of whiteness which also has important implications for politics.

Case Selection

Political Scientists who study public opinion usually rely on large scale survey data sets to understand what regular Americans think about politics. This does not capture the whole picture as Americans have little ideological constraint (Converse, 1964) and answer survey questions based on passing fancies and may not have a genuine opinion on the ques-

tions asked (Zaller, 1992). Instead, I propose a qualitative approach to understanding public opinion. Although investigation of white racial attitudes is a national question, doing a qualitative case study can both help understand how white Americans are conceptualizing their white identity in their own words and make sure that future extensions of the research ask the right questions.

I selected the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area as the case study for this research because of the unique culture of race and politics: the overwhelmingly white population, the history of stark racial disparities, and the reputation for progressive politics. Federalism scholar Daniel Elazar argued that states fall into three categories of political culture: individualistic, with emphasis on private concerns and limited government; traditionalistic, with a paternalistic and elitist conception of the state; and moralistic, with emphasis on communal concerns and public benefit (Elazar, 1972). Moralistic states tend to have higher levels of political participation and more innovative social programming but aren't necessarily ideologically liberal: Minnesota and Utah are both moralistic despite being on opposite ideological poles (Mead, 2004). Elazar classified Minnesota as the "epitome" of moralistic culture, evidenced by its high levels of amateur participation in politics and progressive social policy implementation (Elazar et al., 1999). This is in part also because of the unusual formulation of the Democratic party in Minnesota as the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) party. Founded in 1944, the DFL brought together a coalition of farmers, old line Democrats, New Deal urban intellectuals, and unionized workers to compete with Republican political dominance (Mitau, 1960). Instrumental in the founding of this new Democratic party was Hubert H. Humphrey, who famously encouraged democrats to "get out of the shadow of states rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights" (ibid). Humphrey emphasized political pluralism and civil rights as the bedrock of the DFL, helping to establish the liberal reputation that the state has today (Delton, 2002).

Along with the history of and reputation for progressivism in the social policy realm,

Minneosta maintains a myth of racial equity. As recently as 2000, midwest historian Rhoda Gilman argued that "there is no single deep cleavage among racial or cultural lines" in the state (Gilman, 2000). This is partially because of Minnesota's overwhelmingly white population: data from the Census Bureau shows that Minnesota is nearly 80% white and the Twin Cities, while more diverse, are 72% white (noa, 2020). Historically, Minnesota was even more homogeneous, with 96.7% of the population caucasian in the 1980 census. In his study of the state's moralistic political culture, Elazar argued that "while [nonwhite] groups have been given an extensive amount of attention in Minnesota public policy since the civil rights revolution, they represent too small a proportion of the population to have an impact on the state's political culture" (Elazar et al., 1999). This perpetual ignorance of racial and cultural diversity contributed to the culture of "oppressive whiteness" that non-white residents of the state feel today (Shin, 2016).

Although Minnesota's reputation is for political liberalism, there is dissonance between its progressive reputation and the reality of racial inequality in the state. While the Twin Cities are praised for high standards of living, they are also home to some of the largest racial disparities in the country (Furst and Webster, 2019). More blacks arrived in the Twin Cities during the great migration, and were met with increasing housing disparities between their fellow white citizens (Bruch et al., 2019). These disparities were formed and enforced through policies like redlining, racially restrictive housing covenants, and strategic placement of interstate highways (Rothstein, 2017). In Hennepin County Minnesota, racially restrictive housing covenants have documented present-day effects on housing prices, Black population, and Black homeownership rates (Sood et al., 2019).

Minnesota's major metropolitan area is an ideal place to investigate the political consequences of the different types of white identification because of the contradictions and paradoxes embodied in the state known for its liberalism. The Twin Cities have seen economic growth and increases in racial diversity: St. Paul is home to the largest urban Hmong

population in the world, and Minneapolis is considered the Somali capital of the United States (Gilman, 2000). These demographic changes are accompanied by a number of other trends that are also happening on a national scale: there have been 195 police-involved deaths in the state of Minnesota since 2000, some of which erupted into protests throughout the Twin Cities (Hargarten et al., 2020). More recently, Minnesota became the spark that ignited nationwide protests against police brutality following the video-recorded and drawn out death of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis. In sum, these features of the Twin Cities allow us to gain greater leverage on understanding the role of white identity in shaping the political—and specifically racial—attitudes of white Americans.

Data and Methods

The first round of interviews took place during February and March 2020. I recruited 41 white residents of the metropolitan area over the age of 18 for in-depth semi-structured interviews that lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews covered political identities and attitudes, focusing specifically on race; understandings of whiteness, nationalism, and citizenship; and opinions about current political events including the impeachment trial, the Democratic primary, the Me Too movement, and Black Lives Matter. The base interview protocol is in Appendix A.

I used non-probability sampling methods to analyze this specific population. While there are limitations for population level inferences, this research aims to develop theoretical understanding that can motivate future quantitative work. The first round of recruitment utilized convenience sampling through in-person recruitment and hanging 109 flyers at 57 locations in the Twin Cities and inner-ring suburbs including coffee shops, colleges and universities, community and technical colleges, community centers, libraries, and YMCAs. I also used snowball sampling to recruit more participants. My sample spanned male (N

= 26) and female (N = 15), second generation immigrants (N = 5), Republicans (N = 7), Democrats (N = 25), and independents (N = 9). Most participants either had a college degree (N = 16) or graduate degree (N = 21).

The second round interviews took place in July and August 2020 and included 19 of the original participants for interviews lasting between 20 and 60 minutes. The second-round sample consisted of a subset of the original participants including male (N = 12), female (N = 8), Republicans (N = 3), and Democrats (N = 17). Follow-up interviews covered similar topics as the first round but focused on attitudes about the major political events of the intervening months and were specifically formulated to test the theory generated by the first round interviews. The base interview protocol for second round interviews is in Appendix B, along with information about interview participants.

Each of the interviews were digitally recorded with informed consent. For the first round of interviews, I conducted analysis in MAXQDA using the constant comparative method of coding. This method of combines a priori themes with inductive insights and is "designed to aid analysts in generating a theory which is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data, and in a form which is clear enough to be readily, if only partially, operationalized for testing in quantitative research" (Glaser, 1965). For second-round interviews, I used a method of coding that is more favorable for the provisional testing of my theory by using analytic induction along with coding for the test of the theory developed in the first stage.

Black Lives Matter and the 2020 Uprising

Literature about political protests finds that it can matter in different ways for different audiences depending on timing and location. Spatial proximity to protests increases

the efficacy of the protest messages and lead to policy support at the polls (Branton et al., 2015; Enos et al., 2019). However, violent protests can sometimes have the opposite effect and decrease the strength of the protest message and even result in more support for Republican candidates (Wallace et al., 2014; Wasow, 2020). There is evidence that the Black Lives Matter movement specifically reduced implicit racial bias at the individual level, and broadly shifted white public opinion to be more racially liberal (Sawyer and Gampa, 2018; Mazumder, 2019). White attitudes about Black Lives Matter can also vary at the individual level based on patterns of racial identification (Cole, 2020). My research builds on this, and addresses the effects of protest on white attitudes aggregated across the three types of white identity: racial agnostics, racial preservationists, and racial reconstructionists.

In the first round interviews that took place in February and March 2020, I found that the three types of white identification were associated with the way that individuals expressed support for the Black Lives Matter movement. During the first round, racial agnostics were somewhat likely to support the goals of the Movement for Black Lives, but were often critical of the disruptive protest methods used to achieve these goals. Sophia[1], a racial agnostic, was put off from the movement when Black Lives Matter protesters blocked her commute home from work by occupying the highway. She said "I believe in demonstration, I believe in voicing your opinion, and I believe in not interfering in people's lives...shutting down the highway when people are just trying to get home after working a hard day is not the way to do it." In some cases, they were even less supportive of Black Lives Matter because they reject identity politics and therefore do not see a need for racial identification in other groups. Racially agnostic Juliet asserted that "I don't really think that skin color should be a part of our central identity...there's not a reason to have Black Lives Matter without actual oppression." Failing to comprehend whiteness at work in their own lives, racial agnostics are also less likely to understand the role of race in shaping the lives of others making them ultimately less sympathetic to movements like Black Lives Matter.

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[1]All names have been changed to protect the identity of individuals

Racial preservationists are not generally supportive of Black Lives Matter. This group feels actively maligned by the mere statement, let alone the movement, of Black Lives Matter and are likely to endorse the counter-statement of All Lives Matter. This is partially because they see themselves as increasingly discriminated against on the basis of their own white identity. Andrew, a racial preservationist who mentioned having a hard time finding a job after college because he is a white man, said "I think just focusing on one race just doesn't make sense...I think a lot of people are discriminated against and not just Black people. . . I think there's probably a better way to go about it instead of just Black Lives Matter." Some preservationists, like Andrew, do not dispute that Black lives matter, but think that the statement and the movement detracts from the identity-based hardships they perceive themselves to face. Other racial preservationists question the legitimacy of the claims of Black Lives Matter but root their opposition in what they perceive as a violation of the social contract for a peaceful society. One such respondent, Dave, suggested that white grievance around Black Lives Matter protests led to Trump's electoral success: "like Trump, hate Trump, whatever. I'm able to tell you what conditions were present for him to get elected. . . Black Lives Matter, when they're running, when they're walking down the street, walking in traffic, yelling shit about anti-cop stuff. . . that's not law and order."

While Dave and Andrew identify as Republican and/or Conservative, racial preservationists span the political spectrum. For example, Tim, a self-proclaimed progressive Democrat, demonstrated a pattern of identification consistent with racial preservationists which was evident in his opinions about Black lives Matter. While he recognized that "racially motivated discrimination is a tricky issue" he also suggested that "there's some problematic rhetoric when people gather around a specific racial identity and say like it's someone else's fault we're being discriminated against." Tim's attitudes are reflective of those who may be politically liberal but are uncomfortable with challenges to their racial privilege.

As a group, racial reconstructionists were the most likely to express support of Black

Lives Matter *and* the tactics used by the movement. This group identifies with their whiteness but also sees white privilege and seeks to amend structural advantages that they have benefited from. They see the Black Lives Matter movement as a way of addressing these advantages and tend to support it more strongly than other white identifiers. In the first round of interviews, racial reconstructionists saw the goal of Black Lives Matter as bringing attention to issues of racial injustice rather than recognizing concrete action items or policy goals. Some of this support is diffuse rather than specific—respondents recognized and supported the importance of Black Lives Matter without really engaging with the movement. For example, Lauren said "I support the cause and I think their choices in social disruption or events that they put on are not uncalled for" after discussing the success of highway closures for bringing attention and news coverage to the protests. But even those racial reconstructionists who reported past attendance of Black Lives Matter rallies and protests thought of the movement in rhetorical terms rather than connecting it with concrete outcomes. One such respondent, Thomas, described the movement as "kind of like a battle cry to recognize something that was because of white supremacy and status quos being overlooked."

On May 25, 202, Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on the neck of George Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds while 3 other officers stood by without intervening. George Floyd died from his injuries in what was ruled a homicide (Zehn and Dennis, 2020). A video of the deadly encounter quickly went viral prompting protests first in the Twin Cities and then nationwide, along with a national conversation about police brutality and the consistent mistreatment of Black Americans at the hands of the state. This uprising happened against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic which was disproportionately affecting Black communities and wreaking economic havoc, especially for the most vulnerable Americans (Williams, 2020). In the Twin Cities, this hearkened back to the uprising following the death of Philando Castile in 2016 but these protests were more disruptive, sustained, and engaged a broader multiracial coalition of protesters (Matthews, 2020). Because of the timing of the 2020 uprising, I have unique analytical leverage for understanding the effects

of these protest on both patterns of identification and attitudes about Black Lives Matter. All respondents resided in the Twin Cities during the uprising and therefore were spatially proximate to both violent and nonviolent protests.

In line with the literature, I hypothesize that the Black Lives Matter protests following the death of George Floyd increased support for BLM but *specifically among racial reconstructionists.* However, I believe that the effectiveness of protests for racial justice vary by type of white identification. Given this, I hypothesize that the violent and disruptive nature of the 2020 uprising decreased support for BLM *specifically among racial preservationists.* For those who do not actively recognize their white racial identity, I hypothesize that the uprising increased their diffuse support for BLM without affecting their support for concrete policy outcomes or willingness to take action. To test these hypotheses, I asks respondents to assess their support for the Black Lives Matter movement in the second round interviews. Importantly, I also asked respondents about two concrete policy outcomes discussed in the aftermath of the 2020 uprising: defunding or abolishing the police, and making reparations to Black Americans.

In addressing my first hypothesis, I found that racial reconstructionists were indeed motivated to more strongly support the Movement for Black Lives as a result of experiencing the uprising in the Twin Cities. Multiple reconstructionists recounted their experiences on the streets during the uprising, like Jasmine, who had previously attended protests for Black Lives Matter but became much more actively involved during the uprising. She recounted being "out on the streets every day or every other day, going to rallies, going to cleanups, and that's been now my life. It's like I spend a major chunk of my waking hours doing this kind of work. I marshal at rallies. I'm on my bicycle scooting around at perimeters of marches and rallies and working with a team of people to keep our leaders and speakers safe. It's become a huge part of my life." Other reconstructionists who were less actively involved on the street, sometimes due to fears about gathering in large crowds due to COVID-19,

changed their behaviors by actively seeking out educational materials. Kimberly recounted that her white identity became more important after George Floyd as she is "trying to grapple a lot with what that means in society" and "doing a lot more reading, like with three other friends we're going through a book together that we chose to challenge ourselves about all of that." Similarly Rachel, a college student, reported reading White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo with her whole family and "thinking a lot more about what it means to be white in America."

This group was radicalized by the experiences of the uprising, and were more likely than other respondents to support tangible policies like defunding the police and making reparations to Black Americans. While before they mostly saw the goals of Black Lives Matter as an abstract aim of bringing attention to racial issues, reconstructionists were more likely to recognized the need for changing political commitments. Rachel considered police abolition an obvious goal, and suggested "it's going to take a lot of work to really defund or abolish the police but it's also something that's going to need to happen." Not all reconstructionists see it the same way: Kimberly expressed support for reimagining the role of police but found the idea of abolition "absurd."

Some reconstructionists were also supportive of making reparations to Black Americans. This is a political commitment that is associated with real costs that can be directly felt by individuals, and shows strength of support for the message behind the Black Lives Matter movement. Jasmine described herself as "a big proponent of reparations" and explained that since the uprising, she created a separate bank account "dedicated to making reparations" to activists in the community and an Instagram educator who she follows to learn more about racism and anti-racism. Jasmine's position is unique, however, because making reparations is perceived to be more personally costly than something like restructuring or abolishing the police. Some racial reconstructionists were doubtful about reparations. Rachel both recognized the need for specifically financial reparations to Black Americans, but expressed some

discomfort with the concept, saying "maybe it'll always make me uncomfortable but I'm fine with it because I know in my heart reparations make sense." Other reconstructionists saw reparations as a remedy for contemporary racial inequality rather than restitution for chattel slavery. Mary agreed that "redistributing money to marginalized communities isn't a bad idea at all" while Lukas suggested that reparations "come in the form of bringing up all people out of poverty and doing a universal basic income where people can afford housing, transportation, education." Even within a pattern of white identification that seeks to amend the status quo and privileges associated with whiteness, there is significant variation in the ways that reconstructionists think about and engage with racial politics.

While racial reconstructionists were mobilized in favor of Black Lives Matter, police abolition, and reparations to Black Americans, racial preservationists were galvanized in the opposite direction. While the video of George Floyd's murder was so drawn out and horrible that preservationists were unable to deny the cruelty of the police brutality, this did not shift attitudes about Black Lives Matter. Philip, while vocally opposed to defunding the police, supported the arrest of all four officers present during George Floyd's murder. However, even after watching the video, preservationists like Philip were still supportive of the police, suggesting that "cops aren't the problem" and "if these people defund the police, if they give away all this stuff... we've lost the country as far as I'm concerned."

Support for Black Lives Matter among preservationists was shaped by their perception of the protests and not just the video of George Floyd's death. One preservationist, Will, said that after the protests he was "just as supportive of what those words mean but a lot less supportive of what they have turned into or what they can mean," referring to looting and violence in the uprising. While Will was able to say that he supported the meaning of the words Black Lives Matter, he associated the movement with violence and additionally did not support policy initiatives. About reparations, Will said "those people are going to spend it and it's going to be gone and it will be right back to where things were... I think

that needs to come in the form of bringing new opportunities." Racial preservationists seek to defend the status quo and the privileges that come with their whiteness, and both the 2020 uprising and the policy demands of the Black Lives Matter movement threaten the maintenance of that privilege.

While racial reconstructionists and racial preservationists are aware of their whiteness in ways that shape their political beliefs, racial agnostics eschew identity politics. I hypothesize that agnostics are forced to think about their whiteness more in the aftermath of George Floyd's death due to the national conversation around race. Most racial agnostics confirmed that their awareness of white identity was higher in the aftermath of the uprising. Sophia's university created a George Floyd Scholarship that she, as a white student, is not eligible for. She explained that "I may be a little better off than a lot of people of color financial-wise, but I'm still not in the position that I can easily pay for college." Similarly, Kyle agreed that he was more aware of his whiteness in the aftermath of the uprising, but said "with a fair amount of honesty, I can look at my personal experience as not being overly compensated due to my whiteness." Events like the 2020 uprising can make racial agnostics more aware of their race and the role that their whiteness plays in shaping their life, but Sophia and Kyle are examples of how this can also be associated with a sense of grievance.

I also expected that the 2020 uprising increased diffuse support for Black Lives Matter among racial agnostics, perhaps in part due to social desirability, while not altering their support for police abolition and reparations. Sophia said that her support for BLM was "maybe a little bit less because a whole bunch of exposés have come out about them and I've been hearing more and more about the negative sides of them. It's not an organization that I support but I support the concepts like their message and stuff." Similarly, Robert said "I feel I'm more supportive of the Black community, sometimes Black Lives Matter. Now, are you talking about the organization or foundation? They're not connected." Sophia and Robert's responses indicate confusion about what exactly Black Lives Matter is—an

organization, a foundation, or a movement articulating a message with concrete demands.

When it comes to abolishing the police, racial agnostics were sympathetic to some vague ideas of reform but steadfast about the need for maintaining a police force. Richard argued that the main problem is with police unions and in particular Bob Kroll, the president of the Police Officers Federation of Minneapolis. He worried that defunding the police would result in a system with more people like Bob Kroll in power, calling it "bullshit because defunding means there will be fewer policemen. Guess who they'll let go? All the new ones. Who are the new ones? The females and people of color. So you end up with the old white guys who are many cases responsible for this crap." Kyle also worried about bad eggs in the police department, but thought restructuring financial resources and responsibilities would be the best way to address problems with police. Kyle suggested that the solution would be to "maintain the level of support that is given financially to the police but redirect it into nonviolent support of the community."

Racial agnostics particularly struggled with the idea of giving financial reparations to Black Americans. Kyle was hung up on the practicality of distributing reparations: "I recognize the disparity between what should've been fair and what wasn't but I, for the life of me, I don't know how that can be accomplished. How much? Who gets it? I mean, the bureaucracy and the process, it boggles my mind." Richard, on the other hand, was concerned about what direct cash transfers would actually mean: "To hand a bunch of people who haven't had money, a bunch of cash, we know the outcome there. The car dealerships will do really well. The liquor stores will do really well...if I was a liquor store owner, I might have a different answer." Although racial agnostics don't believe themselves to engage with identity politics, thier attitudes are clearly shaped by race.

Discussion

The typology of white identification presented in this paper are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive but provide a framework for understanding how variations in white identity shape politics, especially around racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement. Using a sample of self-identified white voters in the Twin Cities, this paper exploits the unique exogenous event of the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprising to track changes in racial attitudes and opinions about BLM. This research design helps understand how white Americans conceptualize their racial identity and how that subsequently shapes their political opinions which is an important starting point for further quantitative empirical investigation.

As a result of the 2020 uprising, Pew has already documented an increase in stated support for Black Lives Matter: 67% of Americans now somewhat or strongly support the Black Lives Matter movement and more Americans are reporting having conversations about race (Parker et al., 2020). My qualitative sample is indicative of this national trend. Most racial agnostics and racial reconstructionists expressed support of Black Lives Matter and recounted conversations and news stories that made them more aware of whiteness. A recent Gallup Poll found that most Americans also believe that there are aspects of policing in the United States that need to be reformed—from policies like stop and frisk to the power of police unions—but that they tend to reject the idea of outright police abolition (Crabtree, 2020). My sample reflects these findings as well.

Race is a central organizing feature of American politics so how types of white identification shape racial attitudes is of fundamental importance for the political system. This is especially important because police violence and issues of law and order are evidently a big part of how both Joe Biden and Donald Trump are framing their campaigns for president. The Biden campaign recently released a 60 second ad highlighting proposed criminal justice reforms and acknowledging systemic racism (Johnson, 2020). Among whites, this framing

is most likely to appeal to racial preservationists, and might have positive effects for some racial agnostics who increasingly see issues with police brutality. On the other hand, Donald Trump's campaign seeks to appeal directly to racial preservationists and agnostics who might recognize police brutality but are more concerned with public safety and limiting things like looting and violent protests. The Trump campaign accomplishes this appeal by blaming destruction and violence on Biden and democrats who want to defund the police and therefore open up communities to more danger (Rascoe, 2020). Opposing police abolition and making calls for law and order play into the desire of racial preservationists to defend the status quo.

There are several limitations inherent in this kind of research, especially when it comes to generalizability for topics of such importance for American politics. This project relies on 61 interviews from 41 different participants living in one mid-sized metropolitan area in the Midwest, so how can it really inform the discipline? The value of this research lies not in generalizability but in grounded theory generation and preliminary testing of hypotheses. Illustrative quotes from individuals give body to the three types of white racial identification, but they are ultimately examples of broader patterns. Moving forward, the aims of this project are to develop a way of operationalizing the typology of whiteness so that these insights can be applied to a population level sample.

Appendices

A. First Round Interviews (N = 41)

1. Establishing Political and Social Identities

   (a) I'm going to start by asking you some questions about your identity and how you view yourself. I'm specifically interested in identities that shape your political life—things like race, gender, religion, sexuality, occupation, class, community membership, hobbies, etc. Things that might have a impact on the way you approach politics or are just meaningful in your everyday life. Given this, how do you identify yourself? Why?

      i. What components of your identity are most meaningful to you?

      ii. What do these identities mean to you? What is important about them, what do you value, how do you feel they affect your life?

   (b) Do you feel that others identify you in a certain way? Why? What does that mean for your lived experiences?

   (c) How would you characterize your political identity? Do you see yourself as having an ideological or partisan home?

      i. Have you always supported that party or ideology? If no, what changed for you?

   (d) What about your social identities? Are there any social identities that are important to you when you're approaching politics? For example, as a woman I care about policies that help women.

      i. Are there specific reasons why these identities are important to you?

   (e) What are some of the ways in which your life has been shaped by your race?

      i. Would you consider your whiteness to be an important part of your identity? Why or why not?

      ii. Have you ever felt discriminated against based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation? How?

      iii. Do you think that racism can be directed at white people?

      iv. Do you think about or talk about race very much in your everyday life? Why? With whom?

2. National Identity

   (a) Where are you from? Where are your ancestors from? Is your ethnic heritage an important part of your identity? How?

     i. How long has your family been in the United States? Is being an American an important part of your identity? How?

     ii. Do you celebrate American cultural traditions like the 4th of July? Is that important to you?

     iii. Do you feel that being Minnesotan/living in Minnesota is a component of this identity?

(b) Are your lived experiences and traditions more shaped by [ethnic heritage] or American heritage?

     i. Do you see your American/Minnesotan and Ethnic/Racial identities as complementary or competing? How?

(c) Do feel like America is changing? How? Is this a good or a bad thing?

     i. Do you think this has affected you personally? How?

     ii. Do you think this is the case in Minnesota/the Twin Cities specifically?

(d) Can you describe to me what you think of a typical American to be like?

(e) What makes someone American? Can anyone be an American?

(f) In politics today, we hear a lot of people accusing each other of being "un-American." What do you think is implied by this accusation? What do you think it means to be American?

     i. Are there any people or behaviors you would classify as un-American? Why?

3. Attitudes about Current Politics

(a) Now I'm going to ask you some questions about current politics, both relating to politicians and different policies you might care about. What do you think about the black lives matter movement?

     i. What about the responses to this movement that include "All Lives Matter" or "Blue Lives Matter"?

     ii. What do you think about the "Me Too" movement?

     iii. Do you think that either of these movements will have lasting effects on American politics?

(b) The 2016 presidential election has seen very strong reactions from both sides. What do you think of President Trump?

     i. Do you think that Donald Trump and his politics bring Americans together or push them apart?

     ii. Do you think that President Obama and his politics brought Americans together or pushed them apart?

(c) Have you been following the impeachment investigation into President Trump? How do you feel about it?

     i. Do you think the process and results will bring Americans together or push them apart?

4. Political Participation

   (a) We're going to wrap up with some questions about political engagement and political opinions. What are the kinds of political and social issues that matter most to you? Why?

      i. What are the most important things to you when figuring out who to vote for in a political election? How to pick a side on a political issue?

   (b) Would you consider yourself to be engaged in American Politics by following the news and participating in elections?

      i. What sources do you regularly get your news from?

      ii. Do you vote regularly?

      iii. Have you ever donated to a political candidate or issue? Which candidates/issues and why?

      iv. Have you ever participated in a political rally or protest? For what causes?

   (c) In the aftermath of the 2016 election, did you feel more engaged in politics or less engaged?

      i. Why? Do you feel like your engagement has made a difference?

   (d) Are you following the 2020 democratic primary?

      i. Do you identify with any of the candidates?

      ii. Which candidates do you like? What about them do you like?

      iii. Which candidates do you dislike? What about them do you dislike?

      iv. Are you planning to vote in the primary? In the general election?

      v. Do you feel like your participation matters? What motivates you to participate?

B. Second Round Interviews (N = 20)

1. Identity

   (a) When we last talked, I asked you to identify the attributes about yourself that are the most meaningful to you—things like race, gender, ancestry, political party, or any other kinds of identities—what would say are the attributes that are the most important to you? Why?

      i. Have these always been important to you? In what ways?

      ii. Over the past few months, have certain parts of your identity become more or less important to you? How?

2. COVID-19

   (a) The world looks a lot different now than when we last talked because of the pandemic. How has this affected you personally?

      i. Do you feel like the government has been effective in responding to the pandemic?

      ii. Do you think that things will go back to "normal"?

3. Racial Reckoning

  (a) As I'm sure you know, George Floyd's death sparked nationwide protests. What was it like for you being in the Twin Cities during the unrest?

      i. Did you ever feel like you or your community was in danger? Why? From whom?

  (b) Are you more supportive or less supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement based on recent events?

      i. Did you attend any protests or rallies during the past few months? What were those like?

  (c) Do you remember the BLM protests after Philando Castile was shot in 2016? How do you think this political moment compares to that one?

  (d) In the aftermath of the uprising, there have been calls for things like abolishing or defunding the police. What do you think about that?

  (e) Some people have also called for reparations to black Americans. What do you think about that?

4. Whiteness

  (a) With race now such a big part of the national discussion, do you feel like you are more aware of being white? How and why?

      i. How does being white make you feel?

      ii. What do you think white privilege means? Can you give me an example?

      iii. Do you think that structural racism exists? What does that look like?

5. Reflections

  (a) Have the events of the past few months, both the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial uprising, changed the way that you think about politics? How?

  (b) Has this affected the way you participate or plan to participate in politics in ways that can include and go beyond voting?

  (c) Do you plan to vote in the 2020 election?

Table 2: Interview Participant Information

	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Party ID	Typology	Re-Interview
1	Brianna	F	18-24	Independent/Other	Agnostic	
2	Hazel	F	35-44	Independent/Other	Reconstructionist	
3	Kyle	M	55-64	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	x
4	Chad	M	65-74	Democrat	Agnostic	x
5	Dan	M	55-64	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
6	John	M	55-64	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
7	Kimberly	F	55-64	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
8	Greta	F	25-34	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	
9	Dominic	M	55-64	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	
10	Dave	M	55-64	Strong Republican	Preservationist	
11	Patti	F	25-34	Republican	Agnostic	
12	Jessica	F	35-44	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	
13	Reid	M	18-24	Democrat	Agnostic	x
14	Dale	M	55-64	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	
15	Connor	M	25-34	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	
16	Will	M	25-34	Republican	Preservationist	x
17	Adam	M	18-24	Independent/Other	Agnostic	
18	Robert	M	55-64	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	x
19	Mary	F	35-44	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
20	Lukas	M	25-34	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
21	Katherine	F	75-84	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	x
22	Jasmine	F	45-54	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
23	Lisa	F	65-74	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	
24	Tim	M	25-34	Democrat	Preservationist	x
25	Philip	M	65-74	Strong Republican	Preservationist	x
26	Karen	F	85+	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	
27	Juliet	F	18-24	Republican	Agnostic	x
28	Sophia	F	65-74	Independent/Other	Preservationist	
29	Rachel	F	18-24	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
30	Marina	F	18-24	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
31	Richard	M	65-74	Independent/Other	Agnostic	
32	Gary	M	55-64	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
33	James	M	75-84	Strong Democrat	Agnostic	
34	Lizzie	F	55-64	Strong Democrat	Preservationist	x
35	Leif	M	45-54	Independent/Other	Agnostic	
36	Andrew	M	25-34	Republican	Preservationist	
37	Nathan	M	65-74	Independent/Other	Reconstructionist	
38	Sean	M	55-64	Strong Republican	Agnostic	
39	Thomas	M	25-34	Strong Democrat	Reconstructionist	x
40	Charlie	M	45-54	Independent/Other	Agnostic	
41	Lauren	F	25-34	Independent/Other	Agnostic	

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