PROTOTYPICALITY THREAT AND INTERGROUP THREAT THEORY:

SUPPORT FOR BLM WHEN USING MILITANT OR VICTIM LANGUAGE

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Abstract

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Black Lives Matter (BLM) symbolizes the need to recognize the humanity of Black lives
and the systemic discrimination contributing to the murders of unarmed Black
Americans at the hands of police. While there were some white Americans who
participated in the demonstrations during the summer of 2020, there was also significant
opposition (Astor, 2020). . The current work seeks to contribute to existing social identity
literature by examining how subtle racist rhetoric in the media, combined with a threat to
the white American identity (prototypicality threat) may impact support for BLM. To
address these hypotheses, white participants will be recruited through Amazon's
Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Based on research from Moscovici and Perez (2007) and
Stephan, Renfro, and Davis (2008), I hypothesize that white Americans who feel
prototypical of the American identity will be more supportive of BLM when media
describes the movement and activists as agents of peace seeking to dismantle systems of
anti-Blackness and end police brutality as opposed to being described as a militant group.

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Introduction

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a social justice movement founded in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer in 2013. Their mission is to dismantle white supremacy and create local power that not only intervenes in the injustices inflicted on the Black community, but also invests in tactics that bring immediate life improvement to the Black community (Black Lives Matter, 2013).

In the summer of 2020, protests erupted across the nation following the murder of George Floyd. During that time, former President Trump exacerbated and incited political discord by calling into question the motives of the BLM movement due to isolated incidence of violence that occurred during the protests.(Astor, 2020). Through his rhetoric, Trump used people's socio-political identities to convey thoughts and feelings about BLM to his reference group and followers (e.g., white, conservative, Americans). In doing so, he influenced the way his supporters saw themselves in relation to BLM. He demonized members of the group, referring to them as "thugs", "terrorists", and "anarchists", and gave other public remarks that added to the political unrest (Beer, 2021). The FBI's annual reports on hate crimes show that during his presidency, hate crimes had increased by 19.49%. In 2019, 57.6% of hate crimes committed were motivated by race, ethnicity, or ancestry. Furthermore, hate-motivated murders had been at their highest in nearly three decades, reaching a total of 51; white supremacists were responsible for thirty-nine of these murders. It is clear that a subset of white Americans

commit brutality on communities of color. Even those who are not white supremacists may at times harbor feelings of animosity towards people of color, and Black Americans specifically, in light of the BLM protests and how they were described by American leadership and the media.

Part of white Americans' animosity toward people of color may be rooted in discomfort with changing American demographics. According to the U.S. census, by the year 2045, white Americans will no longer make up the majority of the population (Vespa et al., 2020). In 2060, the population of white Americans is projected to drop by 19 million, and people of two or more races will be the fastest growing ethnic group, increasing by nearly 200 percent. Research has shown that when presented with these new demographic trends, white Americans demonstrate feelings of threat and emotional hostility towards minorities (Outten et al, 2012, as cited in Bobo, 2017). For so long, white Americans have been the majority, which allowed them to establish norms and set laws that benefit them (knowingly or unknowingly). If the dynamic were to change, what exactly could this mean for white Americans? That is, what is the threat that white Americans feel toward a more diversified America?

Social Identity Theory

In 1968, the nation was floored by Jane Elliot's blue-eye/brown-eye exercise. Inspired by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Elliot separated her third-grade students into two groups: brown-eyes and non-brown/blue-eyes. She told her

students that the students with brown eyes were "smarter, more civilized, and better" (as

cited in Martin et al, 2020). She discovered that the longer the experiment went on, the

more students began to internalize and accept the attributes they had been assigned. The

experiment mirrored the discrimination Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)

face in America, highlighting the lived experiences and disadvantages that they face

every day based on assumptions and stereotypes made about their racial group. Given

today's current political climate and social landscape related to race, how much has really

changed from the Civil Rights era to now?

In 2008, the trajectory and face of American leadership fundamentally changed:

Barack Obama was elected the first Black president (Love and Tosolt, 2010; Large,

2009). However, he received racial backlash during his presidency. At the University of

Kentucky, people opposed to the new president hung a life sized doll that resembled

Obama from a tree, evoking painful images of a lynching. Barack Obama was met with

adverse reactions from members of Congress both during and after his presidency,

evidence of the deep roots of racism in the country (Bobo, 2017). Distinguished figures

such as Oprah Winfrey and Jimmy Carter commented that the animosity directed towards

Obama is largely because he is Black (Samuel, 2016). His presidency marked a turning

point in American history– many thought his election was a step towards a *post-racial*

America. Van den Berk and Visser-Maesen (2019) discuss how any progress made with

the election of Barack Obama in 2008 was quickly dismantled with the election of

Donald Trump through a narrative they describe as "1968-to-Trump", paralleling the race

riots of the 1960s to those of today. As quickly as this new political landscape was

created, Donald Trump became the president of the United States in the 2016 presidential

election, even after losing the popular vote. Was Obama's blackness the antecedent to

what made electing Donald Trump so appealing to white Americans?

Bobo (2017) proposes that Trump entered the political climate at just the right

time to harness a wide swath of followers through disparaging rhetoric towards

minorities. He argues that Trump's success was due to his policies that were deeply

rooted in racism and racist presumptions which are perpetuated by the US constitution

and culture. Adjei (2008) described Trump's success through the *racial greed*

phenomenon. This is a way for white Americans to protect their whiteness. Historically,

anyone or anything that prioritizes and works for the advancement of the Black

community is dismantled because of the perceived threat that it poses towards white

America. This notion further emphasizes the ideology of intergroup conflicts that exist

between Black and white Americans. Although, people may argue that Trump's success

was due to his appeasement of economic anxiety, Williams and Gelfand (2019) provide

evidence that anti-immigrant sentiments, racism, and sexism were more strongly related

to support for President Trump than was economic anxiety. Trump's support is grounded

in racist and sexist beliefs, but his election emboldened his followers to engage in

explicitly racist behaviors. Craig and Richeson (2017) found that by manipulating the

awareness of America's racial shift, white identification with conservative political

ideologies and the Republican party increased. Group status threat was the underlying

motive in their results. This raises the question as to whether there is a relationship

between threat perceptions of white identity and racism.

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory (SIT) posits that humans desire

to create a positive social identity - the evaluative knowledge of the self that is defined by

group membership. People can gain self-esteem through their identification with

important groups; we feel good about ourselves when the ingroup is perceived positively.

Collective esteem is achieved when the ingroup compares favorably to a relevant

outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT is the social psychological analysis of the role of

self-conception in group membership, group processes, and intergroup relations (Hogg,

2006). Its approach proposes that collective phenomena cannot be explained on an

individual or on an interpersonal level, rather it must include an intra-and intergroup

analysis. The intergroup relationship between conservative, white Americans and the

Black Lives Matter movement became increasingly strained following the election of

Donald Trump as US president in 2016(Media Matters, 2016; Asmelash & Tapia, 2020).

Social identity can influence intergroup behavior by causing individuals to

perceive and treat members of outgroups differently in order to boost their perceptions of

their own ingroups. Group norms are constructed by ingroup members and behaviors,

which are then internalized and enacted as part of the social identity because it allows for

individual members to understand their place both within the group and within the larger

society in which the ingroup resides (Hogg & Gaffney, 2018). Internalization of group

norms is what defines influence within a group. The information made salient to group

members is what drives group attitudes and behaviors towards outgroup members. People

are motivated to achieve *positive distinctiveness,* viewing the ingroup as different from

and better than a relevant outgroup. Thus they are more deserving of power and

resources, and thus tend to denigrate towards outgroup members. People rely on their

groups to distinguish between similar and dissimilar others and how to behave towards

the ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

When someone begins to think of themselves in terms of their group membership,

their thoughts, feelings and behaviors are filtered through the lens of the group prototype.

Prototypes are the fuzzy sets of attributes that relate to one another in a meaningful way

and capture similarities within the group, while simultaneously establishing differences

between groups (Hogg, 2006), defining a group through intra-group similarities (norms)

and intergroup distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1959; 1969). Prototypes are the cognitive

representations of attributes which best make up the group (Hogg, 2007) by describing

and evaluating categories, while also prescribing group members' behavior. Prototypes

provide boundaries and traits which tell people what characterizes a group and makes that

group different from other groups because they maximize group *entitativity*. Group

entitativity are the properties of a group which rest on clear boundaries, internal

homogeneity, social interaction, clear internal structure, common goals and fate (Hogg, 2006; Hogg et al., 2007). Together these properties are what defines the "groupiness" of a group. Furthermore, group entitativity can be described through the *metacontrast principle*, which maximizes the ratio of intragroup similarities to intergroup differences. This includes aligning oneself with group norms; a person compares themselves to their group prototype to know who they are (Tajfel, 1959) and how they fit in (Hogg, 2005). Social comparisons are strongly related to social influence, which has an opinion-based existence, allowing it to have a secure normative aspect (Gaffney & Hogg, 2017). People are driven to understand themselves and their place in the world, but when they are unable to define their self-concept they rely on comparisons to similar others (Festinger, 1954). The behaviors and thoughts of similar others inform ingroup members' conceptualization of the self. The comparison to those that are similar pressure groups to be uniform in order to decrease conflict between one's own belief and that of another ingroup member (Hogg & Gaffney, 2014). Social comparisons also provide information about their relevant outgroup, and allow groups to distinguish themselves from others. Conforming to group norms refers to accepting ingroup norms as representative of the self (Gaffney and Hogg, 2017). Furthermore, from the social identity perspective, people have a drive toward achieving prototypicality in their important reference groups (Hogg & Turner, 1987).

When viewing someone through the lens of the group prototype, people become categorized as part of their group, changing how they perceive themselves and others. This process, *depersonalization*, transforms perceptions of the self, ingroup, and outgroup members by viewing them through the lens of their respective prototypes (e.g,. Gaffney & Hogg, 2017). The group prototype is determined through comparisons of the ingroup to relevant outgroups - who is in the group and who is not, and determines what is prototypical for the ingroup (e.g., Turner et al., 1987). The comparisons refer to intergroup relations - where social comparisons are motivated by similarities between members of a group, *intra*group, and differences between groups, *inter*groups (Tajfel, 1972, p. 296). Ingroups describe and evaluate the self, and others, thus explaining ingroup favoritism, the biases people have towards their own ingroup(s) over other outgroups. Furthermore, this explains why groups compete to be better and different (Hogg, 2006), which can also lead to intergroup conflict.

Consider the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was a prominent outgroup member for many white Americans. His influence over not just Black Americans, but the US as a whole arose during a time when Black people were being denied basic human rights and treated as less than white Americans. Dr. King fought to dismantle systems which upheld routine discriminatory and racist policies towards Black people, such as segregation in schools and other public domains, and exclusionary acts when applying for housing or jobs. In addition, he played a key role as

the catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement, challenging and creating public aversion to white supremacy and sanctioned violence towards Black Americans. These conflicts are often brought on by perceptions of threat. Stephan and colleagues' (2008) intergroup threat theory (ITT) propose that there are two kinds of threat: realistic and symbolic. Realistic threats can represent physical harm or threats to resources, whereas symbolic threats refer to features of an outgroup that pose a threat to power or cultural worldviews. However, both types of threat have more to do with the ingroup's *perception* of threat rather than any actual threat the outgroup may possess. King's assassination was driven by the perceived threat(s) he posed to white Americans: their racial superiority, the hold white Americans had over the American prototype, and the unveiling of the truths of the systems which privilege white Americans, at the expense of Black Americans.

Intergroup Threat Theory

Social groups, such as religion, political parties, or race, shape our lives and identities. Groups, characterized by membership criteria and boundaries, fulfill certain psychological needs such as acceptance, support, and the provision of norms and values that members can refer to (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2017). Furthermore, groups help to boost esteem, which gives life meaning, increases distinctiveness from outgroups, and provides certainty about the social world and one's place in it. The groups salient to a person's self-definition are regarded as their ingroup. Relevant outgroups also aid in understanding one's own group by comparing one's

ingroup to the outgroup. As identification with the ingroup becomes salient, outgroups that are seen as having the power to cause harm to the ingroup or are somehow different from the ingroup are perceived as threatening. Groups that have the power to cause physical harm or destroy the ingroup is a threat to the group's existence, while groups that are seen as having different values pose a threat to the unified system of meaning of the ingroup (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2017). The tribal psychology mindset proposes that differing groups will perceive threat from outgroups even if none exists (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986), meaning that the ingroup is predisposed to threat perceptions from the outgroup.

Intergroup threat theory (ITT) posits members from one group may perceive another group is in the position to cause them harm (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). This suggests that people tend to perceive outgroups as a threat to the ingroup because group members are prone to ingroup bias, with the expectation that future intergroup relations will, in some way, be harmful to the ingroup (Stephan et al. 2008; 2017). ITT identifies two main types of the threat: realistic threat, such as physical harm or loss of resources, and symbolic, a threat to the integrity or validity to the group's meaning. Particularly, Stephan et al., (2017) suggest that antecedents such as relative power, history of conflict, and belief that there is a difference in cultural values and characteristics make intergroup threat perceptions more likely.

These antecedents impact response consequences in regard to an individual's cognition, affects, and behaviors towards their own group and outgroups. Cognitive responses to intergroup threat affect changes in perceptions of the outgroup, attributions of behavior, outgroup homogeneity, and increase perceptions of threat related to emotions in others. As a consequence, group members may experience cognitive bias, communication and memory bias, and ingroup favorability and cohesion. Cognitive biases heighten threat perceptions, thus making any violence or malice held toward the outgroup more easily justifiable. Cognitive threat responses make it difficult to think clearly and accurately in regards to the outgroup and impair intergroup responses.

Emotional responses to threats are usually negative such as anger, fear, and panic. Threat may decrease feelings of empathy towards outgroup members, but increase emotional empathy for ingroup members. When people feel that they are threatened on an individual level, they become concerned with their own security or their self-image, and fear is evoked as a response. However, when threats are directed towards the group, the concerns shift to the welfare of the group as a whole. Because the entire ingroup feels that it is being threatened, feelings such as anger and resentment are seen as more appropriate responses because it mobilizes the ingroup to respond to the threat. For example, Stephan et al.'s (2008) work on the 9/11 attacks show that individual threats direct concerns inward, where emotions (such as fear) are focused on one's own safety and how their beliefs and values were challenged by Muslim fundamentalists. However,

group threats aimed concerns towards the group as a whole. Thus the threat was

perceived to be directed to the American economy, systems of government, and the

American way of life.

Behavioral responses can range from submission, direct or displaced hostility,

discrimination, as well as other forms of explicit intergroup conflict. Intergroup threat is

consequential for the ingroup dynamic; threat can lead to negative reactions to ingroup

deviants or defectors and increase policing of intergroup boundaries (i.e., ingroup

deviants and defectors do not have enough prototypical qualities to be a part of the

ingroup). For instance, counter-movements such as All Lives Matter, Proud Boys, and

Blue Lives Matter, were born out of the perceived threat posed by BLM movement.

These groups are fostered by positive reference groups (those that share the same or

similar views) in opposition to negative reference groups (those that are perceived as

threatening) (Starks, 2022). These movements came into fruition as forms of resistance

to a movement which focuses solely on Black Americans as a result of white Americans

feeling deprived.

Framing

The way in which different groups are described by outgroup members can have a

positive or negative impact on the perceptions others may have of them. How does the

media frame the outgroup, or in this case, the minority movement? For example, on the

O'Reilly Factor, Bill O'Reilly attributed the murder of Trayvon Martin to the way he was

dressed. O'Reilly proposed,

> *"If Trayvon Martin had been wearing a jacket like you are and a tie like you are,*
>
> *Mr. West, this evening, I don't think George Zimmerman would have any*
>
> *problem. But he was wearing a hoodie and he looked a certain way. And that way*
>
> *is how "gangstas" look. And, therefore, he got attention. And the reason that that*
>
> *culture has risen is because there are a lot of gangs. And they're violent and they*
>
> *dress a certain way"* (Wemple, 2013).

The language used to describe Martin and his style were summarized by three

words: "gangs", "gangsta", and "violent". According to social judgment theory (SJT),

when people judge a message, there are two latitudes that the position of the message will

be judged on: *the latitude of acceptance* and *the latitude of rejection* (Sherif & Sherif,

1967). These latitudes express a spectrum to which, when making judgements, people

either accept or reject them. The attitudes that people hold become a part of their core

belief system, the *anchor*, and is at the center of this spectrum. With respect to the

protests during the Summer of 2020, there are some people who may have accepted this

outcry for justice because the position already aligned with attitudes they held about the

movement, while others rejected the message. Moscovici and Perez (2007) examined

how people's perceptions of a minority as either militant or as victims influenced the

outgroup majority's perceptions of them. Militant minorities attempt to influence

majority members through combative tactics, which provoke an external conflict and produce latent influence. In contrast, victim minorities advocate for change by creating an internal conflict and guilt within the majority. They found that victim minorities were more successful in influencing the majority group's perception of social guilt felt towards the victim minorities. This would suggest that the victim minorities were able to influence the majority without actually changing their attitudes. The victim minority's agenda was focused more on the repression and suffering of the group, and wanting to right that injustice, while the militant minority's agenda wanted to change the relationship between the groups which created conflict. The rhetoric used in the messages likely influenced whether or not people accepted or rejected racially motivated social protests (see Page, 2017)

Riddle et al. (2020) examined how online news sources directed at different audiences frame protests and police interactions, specifically focusing on the protest that followed the murder of Michael Brown in 2014. Media's coverage of social movements can create a sense of threat from the social movement. For example, when the intended audience was African American, the news sources provided more explanatory information on the Brown killing, framing it as unjust and creating context for why the protests are necessary, rather than focusing on the police and the negative components of the protests. However, sources oriented towards the general public were more likely to emphasize police and the protest. They found that the narratives which underscore

conflicts between law enforcement and protestors were more prevalent in sources directed towards the general public compared to sources directed toward African Americans. In short, the content that is provided to the general public by top general media sources slighted the information in a way that distort the message of the protests.

The racial divide between white and Black Americans and their views on police and policing is not a new concept. Reinka and Leach (2017) analyzed the differences between white and Black Americans' attention, attitudes, and reactions towards protests against police violence. They found that Black Americans believed that racial bias exists in law enforcement's use of deadly force, perceive injustice to be the catalyst of protests, and are therefore more supportive of protests that aim to counter perceived injustice (e.g., BLM) than white Americans. Furthermore, Reinka and Leach also found that Black participants characterized the protests using a more authoritative tone, used more positive and empowered language, and focused more on the *cause* of the protest than white Americans. Their results propose that BLM creates political solidarity and collective empowerment for Black Americans. Riddle et al. and Reinka and Leach's works demonstrate how the media can further perpetuate the cycle of anti-Blackness, and the impact it has on the general public.

The media plays a key role in the depictions of criminality and how that shapes perceptions of crime and justice practices (Welch, 2007). Mass media perpetuates stereotypes about people–specifically POC–and for some people, television provides

them with their only opportunity to gain insight into other cultures. Roberts and Rizzo

(2020) found that Black Americans are overrepresented as criminals on TV shows

compared to white Americans (who are overrepresented as victims). Viewers exposed to

the stereotypes of Black people as perpetrators and white people as victims were more

likely to hold perceptions of Black people as criminals, anti-Black attitudes, and support

harsher criminal sentences towards Black people compared to white people (Dixon, 2008;

Tukachinsky et al., 2015 as cited in Roberts & Rizzo, 2020).

Pop culture has become an avenue for gaining insight into what masses of people

are dreaming, thinking, and feeling (Lemons, 1977). Many films characterize Black

people, in comparison to white people, as morally inferior, using profanity most of the

time, being physically violent, and involved in activities that are against the law

(Ştefanovici, 2014). Over the last few years when Black individuals were unjustly

murdered by law enforcement, the media often used their mugshots or mentioned details

from their past as a means to justify their murders (e.g., George Floyd allegedly used a

counterfeit bill moments before he was murdered; Trayvon Martin looking 'suspicious'

because of his hoodie (Murphy, 2021)). These depictions attempt to rationalize the

murders, preserve the generalized belief that their murders were just, and attempt to

discredit the racial motivation behind them. Dukes and Gaither (2017) argue media's

coverage of racial and ethnic stereotypes shape public opinion and criminal proceedings.

Their results indicate that Black people are assigned more blame when they are

victimized compared to victimized whites, and are more often stereotyped negatively and

portrayed as shooters/violent/stereotyped negatively. Overrepresentation of negative

stereotypes pertaining to BIPOC communities (i.e., thugs, criminals, etc.) influences the

general beliefs about different cultural or racial groups, which may impact societal views

of movements like BLM, that work to expose the systemic racism underlying the

mistreatment of Black people by law enforcement.

        The election of President Trump represented a dramatic departure from the

policies of former President Obama. Trump incited racial disparities and violence in

America, and he made clear distinctions as to who was "one of us" and who was not.

During his presidency, Trump proposed many anti-immigration policies, specifically

targeting people in countries like Haiti (which he referred to as a "shithole"), and

suspended immigration from Muslim countries, and Mexico, portraying Mexican

immigrants as rapists and "bad hombres". Conversely he urged America to start

accepting more persons from countries like Norway, where the majority of the population

is white (Watkins & Phillip, 2018; as cited in Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). This suggests that

Trump was never actually against immigration, but that his motive behind these policies

were to discriminate against specific racial groups. If the president of the United States

was publicly endorsing racist ideologies, what message does that send to white

Americans as to how they should perceive BIPOC persons? Is Trump suggesting that

people from Muslim countries, or countries like Haiti and Mexico aren't "American"

enough? What does it mean to be American?

Prototypicality Threat

People will often go to extreme lengths on behalf of their groups. Normal social

cognitive and social interactive processes that relate to group identification and belonging

can cause people to go to extremes to be accepted as members of a group (Goldman and

Hogg, 2016). When group membership is salient to the self-concept, the degree to which

one will support and engage in extreme behaviors on behalf of the group is often a result

of one's perception of prototypicality to one's group and the probability of being

accepted by the group based on that behavior. Individual characteristics of social

influence, such as the need for approval or being liked, are dependent on others (Levine

and Russo, 1987) to obtain information or hold a positive self-image. Influence comes

from the belief that others' views are valid and reliable sources of information of the

social world, and that the endorsement of those views are socially desirable (i.e.,

normative) to the group (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955).

As group membership becomes salient to one's self-definition, one's physical and

social realities are shaped by social consensus, with the expectation that that consensus is

internalized and acted upon (Moscovici, 1976; Turner, 1972; 1985). Yet, within any

social group, one cannot expect to agree with their group on everything. Turner (1985)

suggests that uncertainty will arise when a person disagrees with people that they expect

to get along with. This is especially true for those seen as being in the same category or

group as oneself. Within a shared social context, fellow group members are perceived as

more influential compared to those seen as belonging to the outgroup. Social influence is

guided by self-categorization processes (i.e., the salience of the situation to either one's

personal or social identity, and the behaviors being driven by these processes) because

when individuals perceive themselves as members of a particular group they strive to

have the same reactions and characteristics as other group members, for example

promoting group attitudes that approximate the groups position (Reicher, 1984).

Isenburg (1986) suggests that groups will adopt extreme normative positions that

are polarized away from a relative outgroup (as cited in Goldman and Hogg, 2016). This

effect is strongest among members that identify strongly with their group (Abrams and

Hogg, 1990; Mackie, 1986 as cited in Goldman and Hogg, 2016). The extent to which

one feels they embody attributes that define the group, group prototypicality, impacts if

one feels that they are prototypical or peripheral to the group. Prototypical members are

viewed as a reliable source of information about the group's attributes, and therefore

about the social identity and expected behavior(s) as a group member (Hohman, Gaffney,

& Hogg, 2017). Thus, when feeling uncertain, peripheral members will look to those

perceived as being more prototypical in order to gauge how they should behave.

Members that strongly identify with the group and feel it is central to who they are, are

highly attentive to the group (Hogg, 2005 as cited in Goldman and Hogg, 2016) as a

means of reducing feelings of self-uncertainty related to one's social identity (e.g., acting in ways that show commitment to the group).

Peripheral group members experience self-uncertainty because they do not adequately approximate the prototype, hence their feelings of being an outsider, and are more likely to engage in ingroup bias and extreme behaviors to alleviate these feelings (Hohman et al., 2017). People that feel peripheral act in ways that will secure their full acceptance within the group thereby being trusted and viewed as prototypical members who ethnocentrically endorse the group in a competitive manner with a relative outgroup. The identity threat felt by peripheral group members (i.e., being uncertain about one's place within the group) makes them more likely to be involved in extreme outgroup derogation and extreme ingroup behaviors to legitimize their dedication to the group (Noel et al. 1995; Reid & Hogg, 2005). Peripheral group members are more focused on impressing the ingroup, especially prototypical members, as a means of earning trust and receiving recognition through more extreme and overly ethnocentric and competitive intergroup behaviors. These behaviors are especially likely to be conducted by group members that believe they can improve their status within the group, as it is important for them to be seen as going out of their way to exhibit ingroup loyalty and commitment through intergroup behaviors. Giessner, Van Kippenburg, & Sleebos (2009) argue non-prototypical (peripheral) members need to be seen as supporting and promoting the group through intergroup competitiveness and normative over-conformity. Peripheral members

will over-engage in group norms and behaviors because they are willing to do whatever it takes to have their group membership be legitimized. Prototypical group members are less likely to engage in extreme behaviors *because* they feel secure in their position within the group. Thus, showing support outside of the ingroup is not an issue. This is because their perception of being a central member to the group also allows prototypical members to be innovative and the ability to transform the group (as cited in Goldman & Hogg, 2016).

Prototypes can lead to prejudicial and discriminatory feelings and behaviors. This is because people are biased towards their ingroups and need to justify why they are better and more deserving(of resources or power) than outgroup members. When people self-categorize as an ingroup member, they polarize away from relative outgroups in order to build and maintain positive distinctiveness–positions that favor the group. Douglas (2017) examines the anti-Black narrative and white supremacy in relation to the American identity. He claims that when the Europeans first encountered the African peoples, they attributed their differences to distinct character traits: wide noses, coarse hair, their dress, etc. That narrative gave birth to the notion of racial superiority and came from the Puritans' and Pilgrims' belief that they were descendants of an ancient Anglo-Saxon group. That is, in order to categorize themselves as Europeans, the Pilgrims and Puritans understood their identity in opposition to that of African peoples (i.e., slender noses, fine hair, etc.). Thus, prejudice towards outgroups [Africans] may have been seen

as normative for the Europeans. Roberts and Rizzo's (2020) combination of classic and contemporary research analyze the persistence of American racism by reviewing social constructs that are federally sanctioned to reinforce the ideological belief that white Americans are superior to other races. America's racial hierarchy was designed to perpetuate whiteness as a superior race, evidenced by societal myths such as the "one-drop-rule" – the response to societal fears that Black-white mixed race persons could blur the lines between low- and high-status slaves–or the depiction of God as white. This suggests that white Americans have enjoyed a prototypical position in American society, which has made dominance normative. Threats to this prototypicality, such as being made aware of increasing racial diversity in America, can create antipathy toward outgroups because it threatens their identities, thus increasing perceptions of threat from outgroups (Rios et al., 2018).

Overview of the Current Research

This research examined [white] opposition to Black Lives Matter as a form of threat. Specifically, threats to white Americans claims to the American prototype (e.g., from the changing nature of the country demographically) may magnify white opposition to BLM. Further, this work paired American prototypicality threat with media framing of BLM. Using a sample of (N = 344) Americans recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), this work examined how participants primed with low or high American prototypicality threat respond to media coverage of BLM, which framed Black

BLM activists as victims of discrimination or militant protesters. This research examines white opposition to BLM as a form of threat. More precisely, threats to whites' claims to the American prototype (e.g., from the changing nature of the country demographically) may magnify white opposition to BLM. Further, this work pairs white American prototypicality threat with media framing of BLM. Using a sample of white Americans recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), this work examines how white Americans primed with low or high American prototypicality threat respond to media coverage of BLM, which we frame either Black BLM protesters as victims of discrimination or as militant protesters.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a

There will be a main effect for prototypicality threat such that prototypical group members demonstrate more support for BLM than peripheral group members.

Hypothesis 1b

There will be a main effect for protest framing such that participants will be more supportive of BLM in the condition in which the media characterizes BLM using peaceful language rather than militant language.

Hypothesis 1c

There will be an interaction between prototypicality threat and framing. Prototypical group members will demonstrate more support for the BLM movement regardless of framing. Peripheral group members who view the BLM movement described as militant will show less support for the movement.

Hypothesis 2a

There will be a main effect for prototypicality on threat perceptions such that prototypical group members will feel less realistic and symbolic threat. Peripheral group members will have more feelings of threat.

Hypothesis 2b

There will be a main effect for framing on threat perceptions such that participants will feel less realistic and symbolic threat when the BLM protests are

described using peaceful language. When the movement is described as militant, participants will experience more feelings of realistic and symbolic threat.

Hypothesis 2c

There will be an interaction between prototypicality and framing on threat perceptions. Prototypical group members who view BLM using peaceful language will demonstrate less perceptions of threat. Peripheral group members who see BLM as militant will experience higher levels of threat perceptions.

Method

Participants and design

Sample

An initial sample of ($N = 344$) participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). This research was specifically interested in looking at white participants for this study, resulting in a final sample of ($N = 319$). Additionally, there were 18 POC participants and seven missing from the data. Past literature suggests that data collected through this platform allows for a more diverse sample pool as compared to collecting data solely from college students (Hohman et al., 2017). The mean age from this sample was $M = 35.04$, with ages ranging from 18-68. Participants were compensated $0.75 for their participation in this study. Recruited participants were asked to declare their political affiliation, along with a few other demographic questions.

Survey

Qualtrics, an online survey platform and experimental design website, was used to conduct the experiment as well as store data.

Design

A 2 (prototypicality threat: prototypical vs. peripheral) x 2 (framing: militant vs. peaceful) between subjects ANOVA was employed to test the hypotheses. The primary dependent variables included: support for the Black Lives Matter movement, feelings of threat from BLM, and the degree to which participants feel they are prototypical in their American identity. An additional analysis which examines white racial identification as a

potential moderate expands the original design to a 3-way multiple regression with the dependent variables being regressed onto the highest order interaction (prototypicality threat x framing x white racial identification).

Procedure

Informed consent

Participants were provided an informed consent which stated that upon indicating consent, they would participate in a study examining people's attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement. Participants from the United States were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: prototypicality (prototypical vs. peripheral) and framing of the BLM protests and activists (militant vs. peaceful). Following the randomization of these conditions, participants completed a survey pertaining to their attitudes towards issues related to the Black Lives Matter movement and protests. Upon completion of the survey, participants were debriefed on the true nature of the study, which sought to determine if prototypicality [of one's American identity] and rhetoric used to describe BLM would influence people's attitudes and feelings of support and threat towards the movement. Following this, participants entered a unique key to receive their compensation in Cloud Research.

Independent Variables

Prototypicality threat

Participants were randomly assigned to either a prototypical or peripheral threat conditions regarding US Census Bureau projections of the future racial landscape of America (Craig & Richeson, 2014).

The prototypicality threat message asserted:

Prototypical: *"New U.S. Census Bureau data suggest that despite America's increasing diversity, it has no effects on congressional demographics. Despite growing racial and ethnic diversity, this has had no effect on representation in Congress. Congress is still less diverse in comparison to the nation as a whole. The data shows that non-Hispanic white Americans make up 77% of voting members in the new Congress, which is much larger than their 60% share of the US population overall."*

Peripheral: *"New U.S. Census Bureau data suggest that America will become a "majority-minority" nation. Racial minority populations are steadily rising, which could make minorities the new American majority by the year 2060. The data shows a declining number of white adults and a growing number of Hispanics, Asians, and other minorities under the age of 18. Demographers calculate that by 2042, Americans who identify themselves as Hispanic, Black, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander will together outnumber non-Hispanic whites. The main reasons for the accelerated change are rapid immigration growth and significantly higher birth rates among racial and ethnic minorities. The latest figures are predicated on current and*

historical trends, which can be skewed by several variables, including potential changes to public policy."

Framing

Participants were then randomly assigned to view a bogus news source, which described two different scenarios of the BLM protests. One depicted activists as militant (aggressive and combative) or as peaceful (Moscovici & Perez, 2007; Riddle et al., 2020).

The protest framing messages asserted:

Militant: *"The Black Lives Matters agitators and domestic terrorists lay siege to small towns and urban cities after the death of George Floyd, continue to take to the streets and appear militant in their demands."*

Peaceful: *"The national Black Lives Matter protest movement, rekindled in the days after an unarmed George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis last May, continues to shine a light on what it calls systemic racism and police brutality from America's small towns to its urban centers."*

Measured Variables

Support

A four item support scale ($\alpha = .87$) captured participants' attitudes, support, and acceptance of the BLM's movement and agenda. It appears as follows: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) I find the mission and agenda of the BLM movement to

end anti-Black racism to be legitimate; (2) I support the BLM movement; (3) I feel

favorably toward the BLM movement and their agenda; (4) I believe in the BLM

movement and their mission to get justice and end police brutality. (1 = *Strongly*

disagree, 7 = *Strongly agree).*

Attitude

Participants then responded to an 8-item semantic differential scale (α = .93) to

gauge what attitudes they associate with BLM. The attitudes scale appears as follows:

Please take a moment to rate the BLM movement: (1) bad–good; (2) cruel–kind; (3)

negative–positive; (4) pleasant–unpleasant; (5) cold–warm; (6) unfriendly–friendly;

(7) harmful–beneficial; (8) violent–peaceful (1 = *Negative attitude, 7 = Positive*

attitude).

Legitimacy

Finally, participants were asked to answer a five-item legitimacy scale (α = .91)

adapted from van der Toom et al., 2011, which measured participants' legitimacy of the

BLM movement and protests. Legitimacy scale appeared as follows: Please indicate your

agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds

to your beliefs: (1) The BLM movement and their agenda to end police brutality is

legitimate; (2) I believe that the BLM protests are a legitimate way to achieve their goals

of ending police brutality; (3) The BLM movement and their mission to end police

brutality is legitimate; (4) BLM is a legitimate cause that works towards ending police

brutality; (5) I believe that BLM is a legitimate cause that works towards ending police brutality (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*).

Group identification

Group identification, the degree to which participants feel they are similar to other Americans, was measured using an 8-item scale (α = .92) adapted from adapted from Hogg & Hardie, 1991; Hogg et al., 1993; Hogg & Hains, 1996; and Hogg et al., 1998. The group identification scale appeared as: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) I am similar to other Americans; (2) I am proud to be an American; (3) I like being an American; (4) I identify with being an American; (5) I often think about being an American; (6) I feel like I belong in America; (7) I have strong ties to being an American; (8) I want to belong and be accepted by Americans (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*).

Self-prototypicality

Group prototypicality, the extent to which one feels they embody attributes that define the group (in this experiment,, Americans), was measured using a 5-item scale (α = .88) adapted from van Kippenberg and van Kippenberg, 2005 and appeared as follows: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) I am a good example of what it means to be an American; (2) I am similar to most Americans; (3) I share common interests and ideals

with other Americans; (4) I am representative of [other] Americans; (5) I represent what is characteristic of being an American (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). .

White racial identification

Racial identification was measured using a 12-item (α = .95) racial identity scale (Reyna et al., 2022) which captured the extent to which participants identified with their racial/ethnic backgrounds. The scale appeared as follows: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) I feel good about my cultural or racial background; (2) I feel a strong attachment toward my own racial group; (3) I have a clear sense of my racial background and what it means for me; (4) I have a lot of pride in my racial group; (5) I am happy that I am a member of the racial group I belong to; (6) I have a strong sense of belonging to my own racial group; (7) I understand pretty well what my racial group membership means to me; (8) In order to learn more about my racial background, I have often talked to other people about my racial group; (9) I have spent time trying to find out more about my racial group, such as its history, traditions, and customs; (10) I participate in cultural practices of my own group such as special food, music, or customs; (11) I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my racial groups membership; (12) I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own racial group (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Strongly agree*).

Threat

Realistic (feelings of threat related to political power, political agendas, etc.) and symbolic threat (feelings of threat regarding perceived differences in moral values, beliefs, and culture) scales were adapted from Stephan & Stephan, 2000. Realistic threat was measured using a 4-item scale ($\alpha = .89$), and appeared as follows: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) People of color are dominating politics; (2) People of color promote policies that hurt white Americans; (3) People of color have too much political power; (4) People of color want to push their political agenda at the cost of what is good for white Americans (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Symbolic threat was also measured using a 4-item scale ($\alpha = .90$), and appeared as follows: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) People of color have very different values than white Americans; (2) People of color undermine American culture; (3) People of color and white people have conflicting values; (4) The values and beliefs of people of color regarding religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of white Americans (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Only participants who identified as being white/caucasian were able to respond to these measures.

Warmth

Warmth (friendliness, trustworthiness, and helpfulness) was measured using an 4-item scale ($\alpha = .89$) adapted from Fiske et al., 2002. The scale appeared as follows:

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) BLM is friendly; (2) BLM is trustworthy; (3) BLM is warm; (4) BLM is sincere.

Competence

Competence (efficiency, conscientiousness, and intelligence) was measured using a 4-item scale ($\alpha = .83$) adapted from Fiske et al., 2002. The scale appeared as follows: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the option that corresponds to your beliefs: (1) BLM is competent (c); (2) BLM is capable (c); (3) BLM is efficient (c); (4) BLM is intelligent (c) (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*).

Demographics variables

Participants were asked a series of questions about their demographics (see Table 1), which included questions regarding their age, political affiliation, socio-economic status, education level, and questions regarding where they primarily receive their news sources

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas, and correlations among variables.

	Mean	SD	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Party	1.39	.48												
2. Support	5.52	1.05	.87	.14										
3. Threat	5.40	1.14	.94	.22	.66									
4. Prototypicality	5.55	.99	.87	.16	.74	.77								
5. American Identity	5.59	.97	.91	.15	.72	.70	.91							
6. Competence	5.60	1.01	.83	.11	.81	.66	.75	.73						
7. Warmth	5.53	1.14	.88	.05	.81	.69	.77	.75	.89					
8. White Identity	5.52	1.00	.94	.19	.69	.78	.89	.90	.72	.73				
9. Attitude	5.56	1.12	.93	.07	.85	.68	.70	.71	.80	.80	.67			
10. Legitimacy	5.44	1.14	.91	.11	.87	.71	.76	.72	.82	.83	.72	.89		
11. Symbolic Threat	5.39	1.17	.88	.20	.65	.97	.75	.67	.64	.67	.74	.67	.70	
12. Realistic Threat	5.40	1.16	.89	.23	.64	.97	.76	.70	.64	.67	.77	.65	.69	.90

Note: Prototypicality coded such that 1 = Prototypical, 2 = Peripheral. $N = 319$. $p = .461$

Results

Data Screening

An initial sample of 344 MTurk workers consented to participate in the online Cloud Research study. Following their completion of the survey, the participants were debriefed to the true nature of the study and were provided the option to re-consent to their data being used in the study. Completion of the survey and indication of re-consent resulted in a sample of ($N = 319$) white participants and a sample of ($N = 18$) participants who identified as POC. Additionally, seven of the participants were not included in the analyses due to missing data. All participants who identified themselves as POC were excluded from the analyses.

Data Assumptions

Support

Visual inspection of the histogram for the support measure data revealed that the measure for support for the BLM movement was negatively skewed. The skewness for the support variable was found to be -1.45 ($SE = .13$), indicating that the distribution was slightly skewed, but meets the assumption of normality for the current tests (Figure 1).

Threat perceptions

Visual inspection of the histogram for the threat measure data indicates that the measure for the perceptions of threat were negatively skewed. The skewness for the threat variable was found to be -1.23 ($SE = .13$), indicating that the distribution was slightly skewed, but meets the assumption of normality for the current tests (Figure 2).

White racial identification

Visual inspection of the histogram for the white identification measure data indicates that the measure for the white identification variable was negatively skewed. The skewness for the threat variable was found to be -1.14 (SE = .13), indicating that the distribution was slightly skewed, but meets the assumption of normality for the current tests (Figure 3).

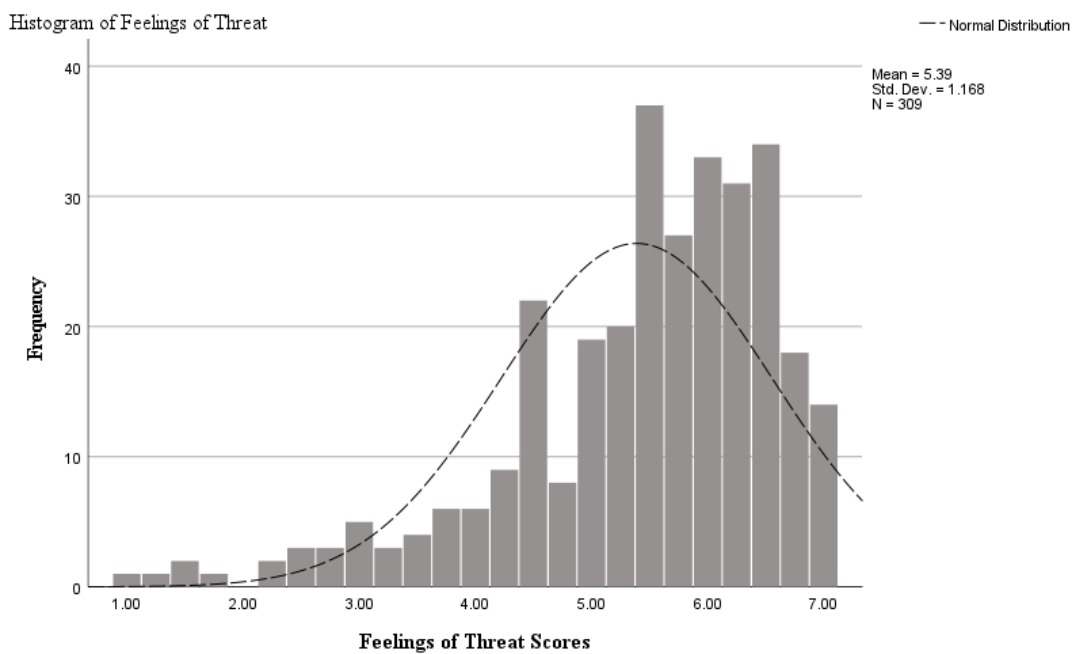BLM SUPPORT THROUGH FRAMING

Figure 1.

Histogram of Support for BLM
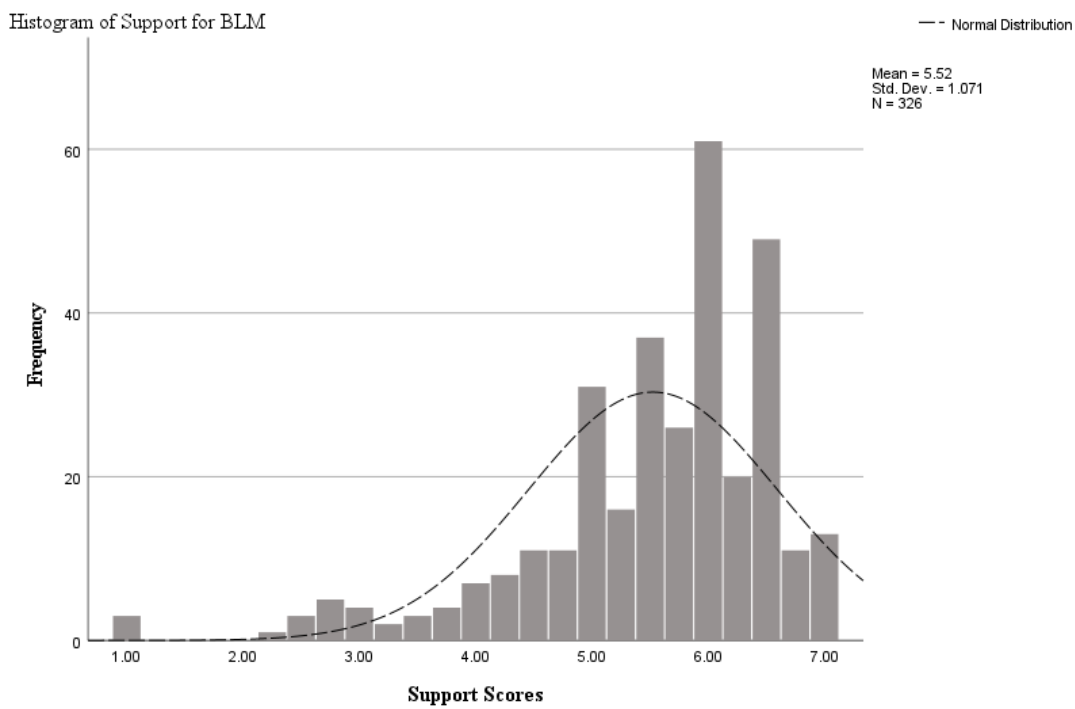
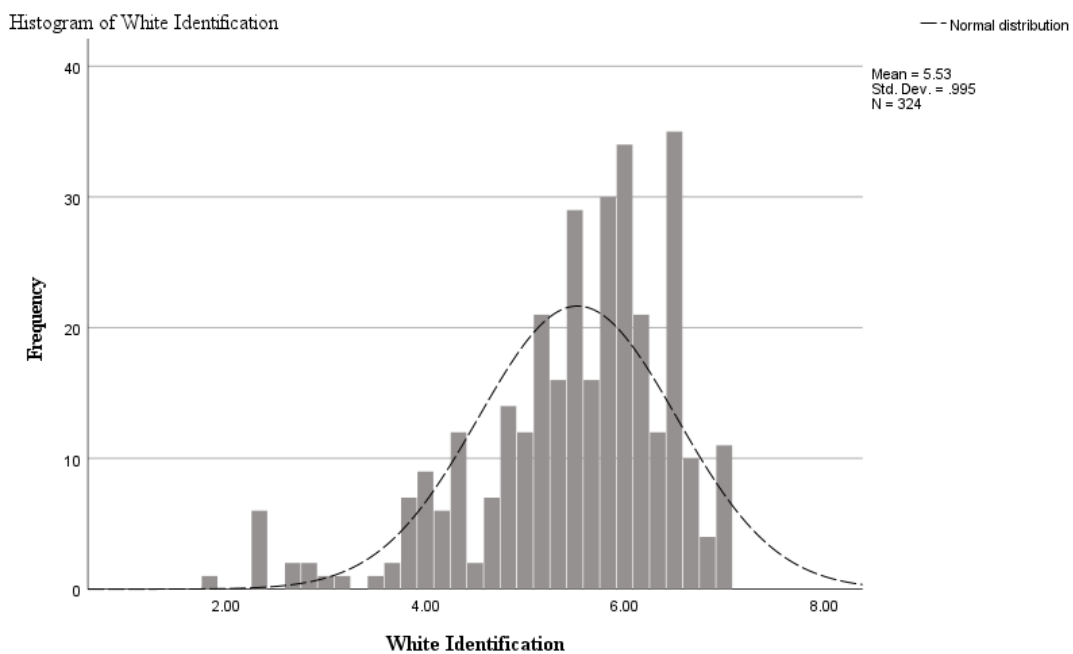BLM SUPPORT THROUGH FRAMING

Figure 2.

Histogram of Feelings of Threat

Histogram of Feelings of Threat

BLM SUPPORT THROUGH FRAMING

Figure 3.

Histogram of White Identification

Histogram of White Identification

Primary Hypothesis Tests

Support

A 2 x 2 ANOVA investigated the relationship, if any, of protest framing and prototypicality threat on support for the BLM movement. The results were non-significant, indicating that support for Black Lives Matter was not related to the independent variables and random assignment was achieved. F(1,325) = .546, p = .461, ηp2 = .002, observed power = .114.

Threat

Another 2 x 2 ANOVA investigated the relationship of protest framing and prototypicality threat on perceptions of threat towards the BLM movement. The results for threat were also nonsignificant, indicating that threat perceptions related to BLM were unrelated to independent variables a $F(1, 308) = .024$, $p = .880$, $\eta_p^2 = 0$, observed power = .053.

Exploratory Hypothesis Tests

Support and Political Party

Political party was added to the above models $F(1, 305) = 6.33$, $p = .012$. Although the other variable were nonsignificant, there was an effect for party such that Republicans ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.19$, $SE = .10$)were more likely to support Black Lives Matter compared to Democrats($M = 5.40$, $SD = .93$, $SE = .06$). These findings had no effect on the initial results of the study, $F(1, 325) = .546$, $p = .461$.

Threat and Political Party

Additionally, political party was also added to the threat model, $F(1,305) = 14.76$, $p < .001$. Again, none of the other variables were significant. However, there was an effect for party such that Republicans ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.11$, $SE = .10$) were more likely to feel threatened compared to Democrats ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.12$, $SE = .08$). These results had no impact on the initial findings of this study, $F(1, 308) = .02$, $p = .880$.
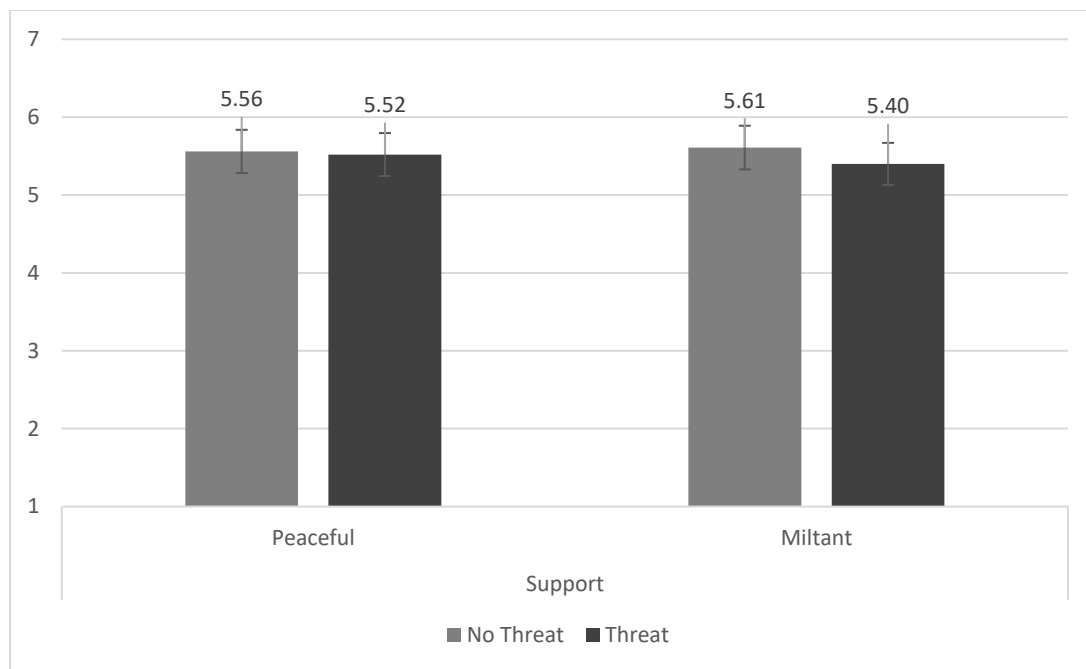
Primary Hypothesis

Support for BLM

A 2 x2 factorial between subjects ANOVA compared the main effects of prototypicality threat and protest framing and the interaction of the variables on participants' support for the Black Lives Matter protests. The analysis revealed that prototypicality threat was not significant ($F(1,322) = 1.12$, $p = .290$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, observed power = .184). Additionally, the data shows there was no main effect for protest framing $F(1,322) = .085$, $p = .770$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, observed power = .060. Finally, the interaction was not significant $F(1,322) = .546$, $p = .461$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$, observed power = .114. That is, the degree to which participants felt prototypical in their American identity paired with protest framing had no impact on whether or not participants supported the BLM movement. The data indicates there is insufficient evidence to accept the null hypothesis, thus suggesting there was no main effect or interactions for support ($ps > .05$) (see Figure 4).

BLM SUPPORT THROUGH FRAMING

Figure 4.

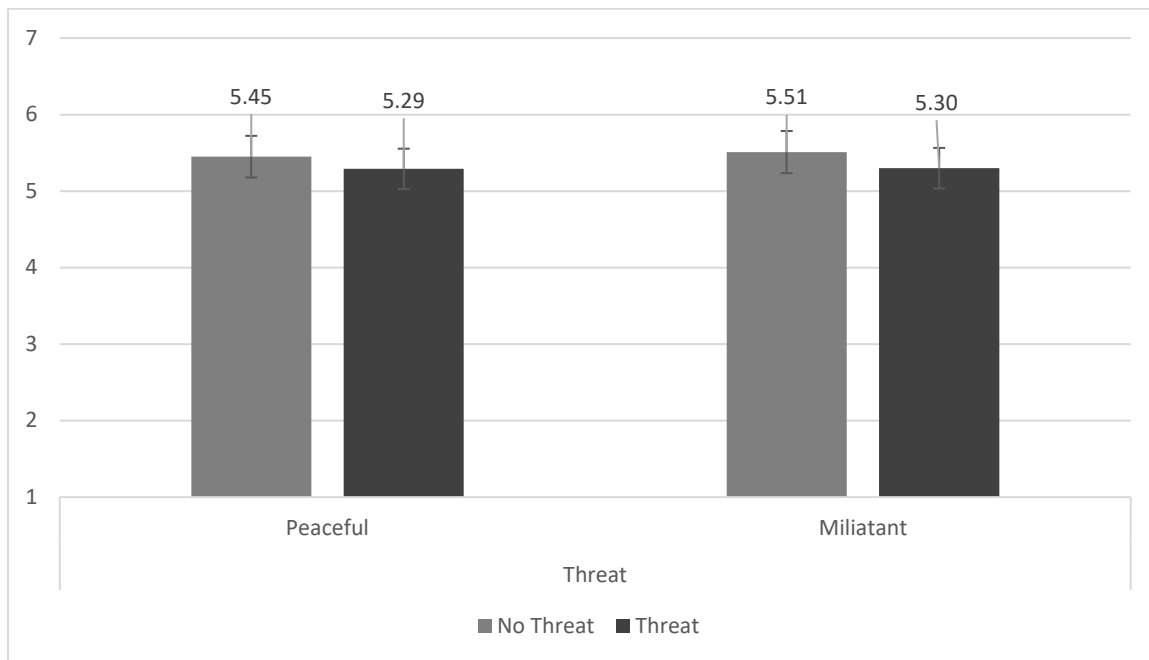Support for BLM by Prototypicality and Framing

Perceptions of Threat

A factorial ANOVA compared the main effects of prototypicality and framing and the interaction of the variables on participants' feelings of threat towards BLM, measured through symbolic and realistic threat perceptions BLM may have on white Americans. The results reveal that prototypicality threat was insignificant $F(1, 305) = 1.86$, $p = .173$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$, observed power = .275. That is, threats made to one's American identity did not impact whether or not participants felt threatened by the BLM movement.. Additionally, the data shows there was no main effect for protest framing either $F(1, 305) = .09$, $p = .762$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, observed power = .060. Meaning, regardless of whether or not the BLM protests and activists were described as peaceful or combative, there was no impact on threat perceptions. The data indicates that there was insufficient evidence to accept the interaction effect of the null hypothesis $F(1, 305) = .02$, $p = .880$, $\eta_p^2 = 0$, observed power = .053. That is, the degree to which participants felt prototypical in their American identity paired with BLM protest framing had no impact on whether or not participants felt threatened by the movement. There was no main effect or interactions ($ps > .05$) (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.

BLM Threat Perceptions by Prototypicality and Framing

Exploratory Hypothesis Testing

White racial identification

Given that prototypicality threat and protest framing were not significant, further

analyses were run to determine if the additions of other variables (i.e., political party and

white identity) might impact participants' support of or feelings of threat from BLM.

Because party appears to be an important variable predicting the dependent measures, it

was controlled in a three way regression. A three-way regression analysis was run to

investigate how well support is predicted by white identity, prototypicality threat, and

protest framing. Overall the model was significant R^2 Model = .46, $F(7, 301) = 37.60$, $p <$

.001. However white identification was the only significant predictor, b = .71, SE = .05,

CI [.68 - .80], $p < .001$. This would suggest that as white identification increases, so does

support. Neither prototypicality ($p = .458$) , framing ($p = .381$), nor any of the

interactions were significant predictors ($ps = .949$).

Political party

Next, a second regression analysis regressing support onto the predictors,

prototypicality threat, white identity, protest framing, and their interactions - this time

controlling for the effect of political party. Given the differences in Democrats' and

Republicans' responses to the BLM protests, this made theoretical sense. When the effect

of party was controlled, nothing in the model, aside from white identification, reached

statistical significance. The results indicate that there were significant results for support

R^2 Model = .47, $F(8, 300) = 33.05$, p <.001. Again, white identification was the only

significant predictor in the model, proposing that as identification increases, so does

support, b = .71, *SE* = .05, *CI* [.62 - .80], *p* < .001. Neither prototypicality (*ps* = .446),

framing (*ps* = .375) , nor any of the interactions were significant predictors (*ps* = .292).

Furthermore, party was controlled for in the regression model predicting threat

perceptions. Again, white identification was the only significant predictor in this model,

R^2 Model = .61, *F*(8, 300) = 58.75, *p* < .001. When predicting for threat, the data suggest

that as white identification increases, so does threat b = .91, *SE* = .04, *CI* [.82 - .99], *p* <

.001. A t-test was utilized to compare the difference, if any, in degrees of support and

threat for Democrats and Republicans. The independent t-test was associated with a

statistically significant effect t(304) = -3.37, p = .001. The results suggest that

Republicans had higher threat perceptions of BLM (M = 5.76, SD = .1.09), but were also

more supportive compared to Democrats (*M* = 5.37, *SD* = .90). Further analyses were

conducted to investigate the relationship between white identification and political party.

In the threat model, both white identification (R^2 = .608, *b* = .86, *p* < .01) and party

(R^2 = .608, *b* = .18, *p* = .042) were significant predictors. In the support model, white

identification was the only significant predictor (R^2 = .480, *b* = .71, *p* < .01). It is

suspected that because Republicans tend to be higher in [white] racial identification that

they took up all the variance in this model, thus explaining how Republicans were more

likely to be both supportive and threatened by the BLM movement than Democrats.

Discussion

The current study analyzed the effects of prototypicality threat and protest framing on support for Black Lives Matter (BLM) threat perceptions towards People of Color (POC). The primary hypotheses that white Americans who feel peripheral in their identity would express less support for BLM and be more threatened by POC in general if they viewed descriptions of BLM characterized as militant rather than peaceful were not supported. Participants were likely to support BLM regardless of if they were described as a peaceful or militant group. Exploratory analyses revealed that as white identification increased, POC threat perceptions also increased, which predicted participant perceptions regarding people of color. Furthermore, political party also appeared to be a significant predictor of the dependent variables. Republicans expressed greater feelings of threat than Democrats. However, Republicans were more supportive of BLM than Democrats. It was expected that Republicans would have greater threat perceptions compared to Democrats. Work such as Drakulich and Denver (2022) propose that these two political parties have contrasting views in regard to supporting the BLM movement, suggesting that Democrats tend to strongly support the movement, whereas Republicans are more likely to oppose, which is inconsistent with the original findings of this study. Republicans' high levels of white identification may explain their simultaneous support and threat towards BLM, accounting for the variance in the analysis.

During Trump's presidency the partisan divide reached an all-time high (Gomez, 2021). According to Pew Research, partisan division reached record levels during Obama's presidency with parties being divided over fundamental political values such as: government, race, immigration, environmental protection, and other related topics. Within Trump's first year, the partisan gap grew much larger (Geiger, 2017). Research from nearly thirty years ago demonstrates that the partisan gap has increased from 15% to 36%, doubling since 1994. Is it possible that partisan identification impacts reported threat from POC and support for BLM? Green (1999) argues that social identification with political parties significantly impacts Americans' political perceptions and partisan behaviors. The 2020 protests saw political leaders and news media using divisive language and rhetoric that potentially justified the anti-protest violence, despite evidence showing that the majority of protests were peaceful. This framing could have contributed to a perception among some individuals that violence against BLM protesters was justified or necessary to maintain law and order. The connection between Trump's rhetoric and violent actions against protesters highlights the potential consequences of using language and rhetoric that can encourage or condone violence against certain groups. Conservative media outlets and politicians portrayed the Black Lives Matter protests as violent and dangerous, making the movement and its activists targets of violence from Trump's followers. For instance, in August of 2020, Kyle Rittenhouse shot and killed two unarmed men during civil unrest in Wisconsin, and there were reports of cars plowing through demonstrations to hit protesters (Hauck, 2020). These instances of

violence demonstrate how identification with political parties or movements can

embolden individuals and justify the use of violence against those perceived as threats to

their political beliefs, law and order, property rights, or other values associated with their

party or movement. Donald Trump's presidency marked a significant shift in the norms

and behaviors of Republicans, specifically in their perception of threats, relevant to the

current findings. He empowered and encouraged his followers by demonstrating a

disregard for the established norms of behavior and by making inflammatory remarks that

promoted violence, applicable here in regards to Trump's responses to BLM. As a result,

Trump's followers appear to have felt emboldened to engage in violent actions such as

the aforementioned case of Kyle Rittenhouse. The departure from the traditional

conservative norms and behavior has had lasting effects on the party, as the new normal

of aggression and violence continues to shape the actions of many of its members. In

short, Trump drastically changed the norms and behaviors for his fellow Republicans in

regard to threat perceptions, emboldening his followers to react with violence.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first of these limitations are those inherent

to running an online survey. However, the advantages of utilizing online survey

distribution (reaching a broader national sample, gathering a more diverse sample pool

than what one could reach on a college campus) greatly outweigh the disadvantages

(Hohman et al., 2017). Research can avoid some of the data quality issues by utilizing the

CloudResearch Approved Participants feature, a tool created to combat issues with data

quality. This feature excludes participants who fail attention checks, provide "bot-like" responses, or who have shown that they are either unable or unwilling to follow study instructions (Base, Studies, and Studies, 2023). This may result in a significantly longer time spent collecting data. Given that online distribution allows for a broader participant sample, Cloud research makes sense. Future research may opt for in-person data collection for comparison.

There were also a few limitations regarding the methodology of the study. Although online data collection allows for large amounts of participants in a short period of time, it may not have allowed for a diverse sample because of the specificity of the participant identification. The manipulations participants were exposed to may not have accurately depicted the interactions they experience with outgroup members in the real world (Rios et al., 2018). The controlled environment of an online study may not take into account all the complexities and nuances of real-world interactions, and the effects of other factors that are present in real-life interactions, such as non-verbal cues, physical proximity, and cultural context, among others, thus limiting the external validity. Additionally, it may be worthwhile to assume that participants were already familiar with media surrounding Black Lives Matter and race relations in regard to racial and political divides, thus rendering the manipulations less impactful.

Future Directions

These findings seek to expand on the existing literature on social identity processes and how it might impact intergroup relations. Particularly, the effect (racial)

group identification and American prototypicality has on some groups' motives to assert

their position within the larger society and the lengths at which some will go to in order

to alleviate feelings of threat. Additionally, this study attempts to assess what mobilizes

some white Americans to engage in collective action on behalf of another group, and

what drives others to allow their racial identification to become so salient that it

influences them to support violent extremism in opposition to social movements like

BLM. Future research may compare the differences between white Americans and ethnic

white groups (e.g., differences between white people and Italians) to determine whether

white individuals have cultural ties that are salient to their identity, beyond simply

identifying as white Americans. Such studies could also examine whether these

differences affect white individuals' perceptions of threats and their desires to support

social movements aimed at achieving equity and equality for non-white minority groups.

Because there is no real definitive way to describe or sum up what it means to be white it

is worthwhile to continue efforts to manipulate the prototypicality of the race or ethnicity

of white people.

White identity is often seen as devoid of content or lacking culture, because of

their appropriation of what is considered mainstream. Devos and Banaji (2005) work

demonstrates Americans view "American" as "white". As the racial landscape of the US

continues to change it raises the question, what exactly does it *mean* to be American?

Scholars have speculated this same concept by analyzing how respondents determine

what makes someone a "true American." Jardina (2014) observed a significant

relationship (analyzing differences between white and American identity) such that

respondent's with high, white identification surmise that the content of their national

(American) identity is exclusive. Participants assert that content such as: American

citizenship, Christianity, speaking English, and, in particular, "being white," are

important components to having an American identity. Their work posits that high white

identifying (compared to low) respondents indicated that each of these traits is very or

extremely important in what makes someone truly American. In this study, we

manipulated perceptions of prototypicality in whiteness, highlighting that there are some

white Americans who tie their whiteness to their American identity. In doing so, the

findings align with theories stipulated by works like Devos and Banaji (2005) and Jardina

(2014).

Overall, this line of inquiry could provide a deeper understanding of the

complexities of race and ethnic identity and how they impact people's perceptions and

behaviors. Moreover, this study may provide evidence that further highlights how threat

perceptions differentiate between intra-group members in regard to outgroup members.

Additionally, it would be interesting to look into how people engage with movements on

different social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter or Reddit, which seem to have

their own networks and operate differently from other platforms such as Instagram or

Facebook. It may also be worthwhile to analyze white identity centrality in terms of

group identification to understand how white Americans view themselves as members of

a majority racial group, and how that identity impacts attitude and behavior. Bai (2019),

suggests that white Americans who have a strong white identity tend to hold greater far-right extremist ideology than Americans who do not hold their whiteness as being salient to their identity. This suggests that white identity is associated with extreme socio-political preferences. This effect was amplified for individuals who had higher levels of social dominance orientation (SDO). Examining the differences in white identification between individuals who engage in right-wing extremist behaviors and those who do not can shed light on the role of white identity in promoting or mitigating engagement with extremist movements. Research has demonstrated that high levels of white identification is associated with greater support for right-wing extremism (Moffit & Grossman, 2019; Schildkraut, 2015). Analyzing white identity centrality through the lens of group identification can provide valuable insights into the attitudes and behaviors of white Americans, particularly in relation to right-wing extremist movements. Research indicates that individuals who strongly identify with their whiteness are more likely to hold far-right extremist ideology, especially when combined with higher levels of social dominance orientation. This association between white identity and extreme socio-political preferences highlights the need to better understand the role of white identity in shaping individual attitudes and behaviors. By gaining a better understanding of this relationship, we may be able to develop more effective strategies for promoting greater social cohesion and reducing the influence of extremist beliefs in our society. As the United States continues to become more racially diverse, the potential for white Americans [whose whiteness is central to their identity] to feel threatened by the impact

that this might have on them continues to grow. There is more work to be done in regards to fully understanding the complex dynamics of white identity and its effects on society to develop solutions that promote equity and inclusion for all.

Conclusions

The primary hypotheses were derived from Moscovici and Perez (2007), which established that the way a minority group is framed influences how a majority or outgroup may perceive them because of the conflict it creates within the majority. However, the exploratory findings of the present work demonstrate a need to further research these processes. Similarly, Craig and Richeson (2014) and Outten et al., (2012) proposed that making white Americans' awareness of America's projected racial demographics led to an increase of feelings of threat and emotional hostility and an increase in identification with conservative ideology and the Republican Party. Hohman, Gaffney, and Hogg (2017) put forth the notion that when peripheral group members feel uncertain in their ingroup membership, ingroup bias increases, as do extreme behaviors, which serve to alleviate those feelings of uncertainty. This suggests that prototypical group members would be more likely to support BLM in comparison to peripheral group members because of their security in their positions. While the findings for the original hypothesis did not support this notion, the exploratory results around whiteness align with this finding.

It is unclear why the manipulations (prototypicality and framing) were only significant when party and white identification were included in the model. It is also

unclear why Democrats and Republicans responded the way they did, such that

Republicans were more likely to support BLM, but also felt more threatened by POC.

Perhaps the prototypicality manipulation simply just did not work, thus the differences in

responses were an error in their point of view of American prototypicality. Research on

intergroup contact and collective action (CA) proposes that when an advantaged group

has positive, as opposed to negative, contact with a disadvantaged group, it mobilizes the

advantaged group to engage in collective action on behalf of the disadvantaged group

(Reimer, et al., 2017). Moreover, positive contact can lead the advantaged group to

support and identify with the disadvantaged group's struggle. As the nation continues to

grow and become more diverse, it increases the likelihood that people might engage in

cross-race interactions thus lowering any stereotypes or prejudicial notions one might

have had there been no interactions at all. The more people perceive the ingroup

prototype as desiring CA, the more likely they are to intend to engage in CA. This is

particularly true for those with little personal experience with the outgroup, as well as

those who strongly identify with the group. These associations were explained by

increased conformity to the group prototype (Di Bernardo, Cocco, Paolibi, Vezzali,

Stathi, Rubin, & Subasic, 2021). Perhaps Republicans identified with some other

superordinate identity, which might explain why they were more likely to support BLM

in comparison to Democrats. It would have been interesting to gather some quantitative

data in this research in order to gain some insight into what the participants associated

with what a "prototypical" American is in regard to Black Lives Matter, the George

Floyd protests, and other related topics.

Taken together, this study offered some unexpected yet interesting findings,

telling a story of the complexities of social identity, both political and racial, and the role

that it plays in prototypicality and social influence. Black Lives Matter may just be one of

the largest movements in US history with protests reaching their peak during the summer

of 2020, where nearly half a million people turned out to show their support nationwide

(Buchanan, Bui, & Patel, 2020). The movement highlights a spectrum by which people

either engage and are in agreement with or are in opposition to and reject BLM's motives

and messages. On one end, BLM mobilized people from all different backgrounds, with

numbers indicating that between 15-26 million people in the US, engaged in

demonstrations over the murders of George Floyd and countless others. On the opposite

end, other works related to identity and prototypicality may have been at play which

prompted reactionary behaviors of violence and intimidation. What identity was made

salient for the individual which, either, attracts or dissuades them from the movement?

Perhaps people identified on a racial or political level, in which case their thoughts,

feelings, and behaviors in relation to Black Lives Matter were prototypical for their

group. Nevertheless, this research adds to the existing social identity literature by

emphasizing the role of prototypicality and framing in the process of social influence.

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