What is Political Identity?
Concept Clarification with Insight from Brazil[*]

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Abstract

References to "political identity" abound in political science scholarship, yet rarely do we offer clear definitions of the concept. This article seeks to clarify the concept by providing a definition that unites current usages in the literature and distinguishes political identity from the related concepts of social identity and political cleavages. I present critical discussion of three major usages in the literature and argue instead for a definition of political identity as categories of social membership that inspire group consciousness and shape individuals' perceptions of power, broadly defined. To illustrate the empirical manifestations of this conceptualization and its analytical utility, I present qualitative analysis of in-depth interview data from Brazil and contrast individuals in the same racial category on the extent to which this identity inspires consciousness and shapes their interpretations of power. This article clarifies a commonly employed but rarely defined concept and offers a broadly applicable framework useful for diverse research agendas in identity politics scholarship and beyond.

> [W]hat is required [for a civic culture] is a process by which individuals can come to develop a sense of common political identity; an identity that implies common affective commitment to the political system, as well as a sense of identity with one's fellow citizens.
> —Almond and Verba,[1] *The Civic Culture*

> [W]e should not take for granted what needs to be explained: the sources and content of national security interests that states and governments pursue. A focus on political identity and the cultural-institutional context, this book claims, offers a promising avenue for elucidating the changing contours of national security policy.
> —Katzenstein,[2] *The Culture of National Security*

> Thus the assumption that social identities automatically and inevitably become political ones is flawed. The transition from a Catholic *social* identity to a Catholic *political* identity has to be accounted for. The presence of large Catholic populations in a country is analytically and empirically insufficient for predicting the emergence of a common Catholic identity in politics, even less the formation of a confessional party.
> —Kalyvas,[3] *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*

> Insofar as states are the prevailing political units in our world and insofar as they extend/restrict political citizenship and define national projects, they institutionalize and privilege certain national political identities. In turn, they provide incentives for actors to publicly express some political identities over others.
> —Yashar,[4] *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*

References to "political identity" abound in political science scholarship. Though individually each may seem perfectly logical and internally consistent, the examples referenced in the epigraphs offer largely distinct, unrelated, and implicit understandings of the concept, understandings from which it is difficult to distill a single, coherent definition. As I will elaborate and discuss in this article, this confusion is hardly unique to these few examples. Indeed, the pervasiveness of scholarly references to this concept reflects in part a growing interest in and concern for the dialectic processes through which politics and identities influence one another.[5]

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[1] Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 503.

[2] Peter J. Katzenstein, "Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 32.

[3] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 9–10.

[4] Deborah J. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5–6.

[5] Leonie Huddy, "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory," *Political Psychology* 22, no. 1 (2001): 127–56; Leonie Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion and Commitment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Rogers M. Smith, "Identities, Interests, and the Future of Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 2 (2004): 301–12; Rawi Abdelal et al., "Identity as a Variable," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 4 (2006): 695–711; Taeku Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008): 457–78.

Yet as these influential works make clear, with increased attention to so-called political identities has come a degree of conceptual stretching that has rendered the concept a catch-all for any identity of interest to political scientists, scholarly rhetoric applied post hoc to social categories of obvious political relevance.

This article seeks to remedy this conceptual confusion by offering clear analytical and empirical criteria that distinguish this type of identity from other related identity concepts (namely, social identity and political cleavages).[6] Conceptual clarity is critical for empirical research, constructive scholarly dialogue, and the accumulation of research findings, of course;[7] but in this article I also argue that an explicit and coherent conceptualization can contribute theoretically and empirically to diverse research agendas that aim to better understand the processes of identity politicization. To this end, I argue for a definition that can lend coherence to the varied usages of the concept that have proliferated in the literature. In brief, I suggest that political identity be defined as *categories of social membership that inspire group consciousness and shape individuals' understandings of power, broadly defined.*

In analytical terms, this definition calls for an approach to political identity as a "category of practice,"[8] one that empirically assesses individuals' own understandings of their identities to determine whether these in fact carry political meaning from the individual's perspective. The contribution of this definition is not just conceptual clarity, but also a widely applicable empirical and analytical framework by which to judge any given identity as "political" without regard for

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[6] In Goertz's words, I aim to provide the "fundamental constitutive elements" that are useful for a range of research questions, regardless of the substantive application. Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5.

[7] Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 4 (1970): 1033–53; David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (April 1, 1997): 430–51; Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide.*

[8] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–47.

some other political outcome of interest in which these identities are manifest, something sorely lacking in this rich area of study (i.e., race is politicized because African Americans overwhelmingly vote Democrat, or gender is politicized because women are marching in the streets). In this sense, this definition offers an avenue to study political identity formation empirically as a distinct element of the "identity-to-politics link," that is, the set of processes leading from social categories to group politics.[9]

This conceptualization also makes three additional analytical improvements over implicit definitions in the literature. First, it explicitly shifts the analysis of political identity to the individual level, centering internal group heterogeneity, distinguishing the concept from "political cleavages,"[10] and avoiding the analytical sin of "groupism."[11] Second, it pushes scholars to move beyond the so-called "minimal group paradigm" central to social identity theory[12] and incorporates elements of group consciousness theory to emphasize one's strong identification with social groups (beyond one's simple awareness of her membership in a given group).[13] Finally, and related to this second point, this definition specifies the "political" in political identity: in contrast to social identities, political identities necessarily operate as a lens through which individuals interpret power relationships between groups.

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[9] Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link."

[10] Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair, *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability: The Stabilisation of European Electorates 1885-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chap. 9.

[11] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Abdelal et al., "Identity as a Variable."

[12] Henri Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination," *Scientific American* 223, no. 5 (1970): 96–103; Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John C. Turner et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

[13] Patricia Gurin, Arthur H. Miller, and Gerald Gurin, "Stratum Identification and Consciousness," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1980): 30–47; Arthur H. Miller et al., "Group Consciousness and Political Participation," *American Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 3 (1981): 494–511; Paula D. McClain et al., "Group Membership, Group Identity, and Group Consciousness: Measures of Racial Identity in American Politics?," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2009): 471–85; Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

In what follows, I elaborate and advocate for this alternative conceptualization of political identity. I begin by briefly and critically discussing three major usages of the concept in political science scholarship: 1) as partisanship or ideology, 2) as rooted in political communities, and 3) by extrapolating from social identity theory. I then elaborate and justify the alternative conceptualization introduced here and situate the concept alongside the related concepts of social identity and political cleavages. To illustrate the empirical manifestations of the concept and how this framework can be applied broadly to any social category or identity, I then present analysis of in-depth interview data from Brazil and contrast individuals who share the same racial identifications but who diverge in whether their racial identities inspire consciousness and shape their understandings of power. The final section concludes with the analytical and theoretical possibilities of this conceptualization in the study of identity politicization and outlines potential avenues for future research.

2. Current Usages: A Brief and Critical Review

Partisanship and Political Ideology

Perhaps the most common usage of political identity ties the concept directly to the political arena via partisanship and political ideology. This often implicit definition suffers from three major shortcomings, namely: that restricting our understanding of the concept to identity *content* (i.e., rules of social membership) fails to encompass the variety of identities commonly understood to constitute political identities; that whether partisanship/ideology are political identities or meaningful channels of identity expression may be functions of the institutional context (i.e., party system institutionalization); and simply that these identities have already been assigned adequate labels, so reserving the concept for partisanship or ideology offers no added value.

The dominant view of partisanship as constituting political identity has a long lineage that began as scholars began to conceive of partisanship as an identity in and of itself. In their canonical study, Campbell et al. famously describe partisanship as "a perceptual screen" that shapes one's interpretation of politics.[14] Green and colleagues similarly describe partisanship as "enduring features of citizens' self-conceptions," as social identities.[15] The view that partisanship necessarily constitutes a political identity is widespread. This is clear in Kalyvas's work cited in the epigraphs.[16] Similarly, in their study of independent partisans in the U.S., Klar and Krupnikov operationalize partisan strength in their survey instruments by asking respondents "How important is your political identity to you?,"[17] suggesting that this conceptualization is mutually understood not only among scholars but also the general public.[18] If one accepts this view of partisanship, it is a short leap to viewing political ideology as constitutive of political identity, though this usage is far less common.[19]

The logic of considering partisanship and ideology as elemental to the concept is that they are central to politics as linkages to formal organizations of electoral competition or as those sets

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[14] *The American Voter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 133.

[15] *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 4.

[16] Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*, 9–10.

[17] Samara Klar and Yanna Krupnikov, *Independent Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[18] For other examples of references to partisanship as political identity, see Alexander Kuo, Neil Malhotra, and Cecilia Hyunjung Mo, "Social Exclusion and Political Identity: The Case of Asian American Partisanship," *Journal of Politics* 79, no. 1 (2017): 17–32; Samara Klar, "Identity and Engagement among Political Independents in America," *Political Psychology* 35, no. 4 (2014): 577–91; Matt A. Barreto and Dino N. Bozonelos, "Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? The Role of Religiosity in Muslim American Party Identification," *Politics and Religion* 2, no. 2 (2009): 200–229; Sergio I. Garcia-Rios and Matt A. Barreto, "Politicized Immigrant Identity, Spanish-Language Media, and Political Mobilization in 2012," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2016): 78–96; Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion"; Marisa Abrajano and Zoltan L. Hajnal, *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Carlos Meléndez and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Political Identities: The Missing Link in the Study of Populism," *Party Politics* 25, no. 4 (2019): 520–33; David Samuels and Cesar Zucco, "The Power of Partisanship in Brazil: Evidence from Survey Experiments," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 1 (2014): 212–25.

[19] E.g., Pamela Johnston Conover and Stanley Feldman, "The Origins and Meaning of Liberal/Conservative Self-Identifications," *American Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 4 (1981): 617–45; Christopher J. Devine, "Ideological Social Identity: Psychological Attachment to Ideological In-Groups as a Political Phenomenon and a Behavioral Influence," *Political Behavior* 37, no. 3 (2015): 509–35.

of ideas that shape voter preferences and worldviews. But this logic is far too narrow and reductionist. Partisanship or ideology may well form the basis of an individual's political worldview, but they also may not. The idea that partisanship is the ultimate form of political identity is particularly strong in the study of the U.S., where the two-party system is institutionalized to such a degree that it likely channels and/or aggregates identities and social forces, rather than serves as a venue for their multiple and distinct expression.[20] In other contexts with weak partisanship or unstable party systems, however, these identities or affiliations may tell us little about the worldviews that structure individuals' attitudes, opinions, and preferences.[21] And even in contexts like the U.S., where partisanship and formal political organizations form the major axes of electoral competition, voters may not meaningfully affiliate themselves with any political party;[22] or when they do, partisan and ideological affiliations may themselves be endogenous to other identities that more meaningfully shape preferences, behavior, or outlook.[23]

Consider, for example, Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo's fascinating study of the voting behavior of Asian Americans, a group that leans left but not overwhelmingly so.[24] These authors argue that experiences that make Asian Americans feel excluded from the American political community

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[20] Indeed, Duverger famously argues that electoral institutions shape the fragmentation of the party system. This can impact whether diverse identities and interests are aggregated and channeled into relatively few parties (as is the case in the U.S.), or whether these find more distinct expression (as niche parties) in larger, multiparty systems. Achen and Bartels's recent work also characterizes voters' electoral behavior as driven by social identities that are not always partisanship, but that nonetheless are channeled by the two-party system. Similarly, Kitschelt has called for scholars to consider the wide array of attachments of voters to political elites and party organizations, attachment that may not constitute identities, per se. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1959); Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Herbert Kitschelt, "Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities," *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no. 6–7 (2000): 845–79.

[21] Noam Lupu, *Party Brands in Crisis: Partisanship, Brand Dilution, and the Breakdown of Political Parties in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Kenneth M. Roberts, *Changing Course in Latin America: Party Systems in the Neoliberal Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Steven Levitsky et al., eds., *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[22] Klar and Krupnikov, *Independent Politics*.

[23] Zoltan L. Hajnal and Taeku Lee, *Why Americans Don't Join the Party: Race, Immigration, and the Failure (of Political Parties) to Engage the Electorate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*; Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*.

[24] Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo, "Social Exclusion and Political Identity."

increase their support for the Democratic party, the presumed party of inclusion. Rightfully, these authors write that "there remain few studies that examine the role of social exclusion in the formation of political identity."[25] But which identity is the "political" one responsible for shaping voter behavior? Indeed, discernible in this study is the presumption that one's party affiliation is of central theoretical importance, which would lead one quickly to the predominant view that party identification is the relevant political identity. But we are then left to explain why the racialized experiences of social exclusion are sidelined, deemed "political" only insofar as they can be linked to support for a political party. An alternative interpretation, I submit, is that party identification and support are simply *expressions* of one's racial identity, which in this case *became* a political identity when individuals suffered social exclusion that they understood to be racially motivated.[26]

The broad point here is *not* that partisanship and ideology never constitute political identities. To be sure, a long line of literature has shown that for many individuals, especially in the U.S., partisan identities fit the definition of the concept I argue for in this article.[27] And moreover, understanding the sources and dynamics of partisan identities and affiliations is a worthwhile agenda in the study of political behavior. I simply argue that we not automatically reduce "political identity" to partisan and ideological attachments because of their presupposed linkages to electoral politics. After all, these identities already have perfectly adequate labels, and there is no clear value added in limiting the concept to partisanship. By contrast, there is potential

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[25] Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo, 17.

[26] For a similar study of Latinos in the U.S. that offers an interpretation closer to the one I present here, see Leonie Huddy, Lilliana Mason, and S. Nechama Horwitz, "Political Identity Convergence: On Being Latino, Becoming a Democrat, and Getting Active," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2016): 205–28. Also see Courtney Jung, *Then I Was Black: South African Political Identities in Transition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[27] Campbell et al., *The American Voter*; Larry M. Bartels, "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions," *Political Behavior* 24, no. 2 (2002): 117–150; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*; David J. Samuels and Cesar Zucco, *Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans: Voting Behavior in Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

value *lost* by diverting our attention away from identities that themselves take on political meaning

("become politicized") in ways that have nothing to do with partisanship (say, in the form of social

mobilization or protest),[28] or by declining to problematize when and why political parties or

electoral arenas more broadly effectively channel political identities. In short, there is great value

to be added by broadening our conception of political identity to focus on identities that may not

emanate from electoral politics, but that nonetheless shape it. We should be more explicit in our

conceptualizations and usages of "political identity" so we can make better sense of political

attitudes, behavior, and outcomes, of which ideology and partisanship are but two. As Katherine

Cramer aptly puts this in her illuminating study of the "irrational" voter in rural Wisconsin:

> Which party people vote for is obviously important. But this study provides a significant caution for our continued reliance on partisanship as the most important predisposition in the study of public opinion. There is no denying that partisanship performs well as a predictor of votes and policy preferences. But what is that actually telling us? If the main divide that people see in the political world is not Democrats versus Republicans but, instead, us versus the government, or people with my work ethic versus people without it, shouldn't we spend more time measuring identities that are more meaningful to people than partisanship?[29]

We need not attempt to wholly generalize from rural Wisconsin to understand that Cramer's point

– that partisanship is not everything – can be true in any context. Coherent accounts of the identities

that shape how individuals make sense of the political world must be able to include and move

beyond partisanship and ideology.

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[28] Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*; Chris Zepeda-Millán and Sophia J. Wallace, "Racialization in Times of Contention: How Social Movements Influence Latino Racial Identity," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 1, no. 4 (2013): 510–27; Bert Klandermans, "How Group Identification Helps to Overcome the Dilemma of Collective Action," *American Behavioral Scientist* 45, no. 5 (2002): 887–900.
[29] Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*, 217.

Citizenship, Nationalism, and State Identity

A second approach characterizes political identity as those identities that form political communities, generally as a citizenry, a nation, or a state. Like partisanship and ideology, these identities are typically cast as political because of their content, in this case rooted in political community. In contrast to partisanship and ideology, however, these identities do not necessarily divide political arenas, but are said to unite them around those attributes or values that encompass, rather than sort, members of the community. Moreover, because these identities tend to entail pluralities of individuals and imply some degree of spatial concentration, they homogenize by elevating shared characteristics and obscuring differences. Take, for example, the "horizontal comradeship" central to Anderson's imagined communities,[30] or the unitary state identities implied in constructivist IR scholarship.[31] Political theorist Chantal Mouffe offers the clearest articulation of this view in her conceptualization of radical democratic citizenship, which

> envisages citizenship as a form of political identity that is created through identification with the political principles of modern pluralist democracy, i.e., the assertion of liberty and equality for all….It is a common political identity of persons who might be engaged in many different communities and who have differing conceptions of the good, but who accept submission to certain authoritative rules of conduct.[32]

As with partisanship, the inherently political nature of these identities may seem obvious at first glance. But the same shortcomings apply to these identities as well, namely that they may form political identities, but need not. Nor do we stand to gain theoretically or analytically by reducing political identity to these other, adequately labelled concepts. But above all, by requiring

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[30] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983). For an implicit example of national identity as political identity, see David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). Laitin also implies, at times, that one's "political identity" is simply any of one's multiple social identities that have been "politicized" in a given moment. See Laitin, 23–24, 352.

[31] Katzenstein, "Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security"; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[32] Chantal Mouffe, "Citizenship and Political Identity," *October* 61 (1992): 30–31.

members of these political communities to be united, these identities can obscure important identities and cleavages within political communities that are in fact constitutive of political worldviews, in particular when constructed nations, states, and citizenries map onto domestic political arenas. Iris Marion Young makes this point normatively regarding the ideal of universal citizenship, which she claims oppresses and excludes groups whose interests or behaviors are deemed out of line with the general will.[33] Instead, Young advocates for forms of differentiated citizenship that create mechanisms for group representation and at times require special rights to accommodate group differences and fulfill the outcomes envisioned by universal citizenship ideals. A similar argument can be made about how a focus on homogenous political communities can obscure other political identities within those communities.

There is of course no denying that citizen, state, and national identities have been important to understanding a wide range of political phenomena. Yet just as with partisanship and ideology, these social memberships should not automatically be considered political identities because of their basis in political community. After all, many individuals may consider themselves members of these communities as simple matters of fact—according to legal status, place of birth, or residence. Whether or not these identities come to shape individuals' worldviews or produce political action or behavior is thus an empirical question, not a foregone conclusion.

Social Identity Theory

The final dominant approach to political identity extrapolates from social identity theory (SIT), pioneered by Henri Tajfel and colleagues. According to SIT, social identity is "that *part* of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group

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[33] Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 250–274.

together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership."[34] SIT hypothesizes psychological mechanisms, specifically the symbolic concern over the group's standing vis-à-vis other groups. Social identity is said to shape behavior and outlook by developing among in-group members the need to "differentiate their own groups positively from others to achieve a positive social identity."[35] Thus, identities matter because the individuals who hold them have a psychological need for positive group distinctiveness, and this creates behavioral incentives for in-group bias and favoritism.

SIT is widely influential in political science largely because of the flexibility of its substantive applications. Yet even studies that rely heavily on SIT in their analyses of "political" identities fail to make a conceptual distinction between the two.[36] This is in keeping with Leonie Huddy's definition: a political identity is "a social identity with political relevance."[37] Not only does this definition lean entirely on SIT, but it also suffers from key weaknesses. Chief among them is that it sidesteps the central task of specifying criteria that distinguish social from political identity, while also failing to specify what counts as political "relevance." Moreover, simply stating that what makes an identity political is its relation to politics verges on tautology. But above all, it is hard to see how this conceptualization is useful for theoretical agendas in identity politics

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[34] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 255. For finer distinctions between social identity and self-categorization theory, see Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion."

[35] Turner et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group*, 42.

[36] E.g., Melinda S. Jackson, "Priming the Sleeping Giant: The Dynamics of Latino Political Identity and Vote Choice," *Political Psychology* 32, no. 4 (2011): 691–716; Klar and Krupnikov, *Independent Politics*; Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo, "Social Exclusion and Political Identity."

[37] Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion," 739. On the other extreme is Smith, "Identities, Interests, and the Future of Political Science," 302. His definition is not explicitly related to social identity, but it is one of the few explicit definitions in the literature. It requires a "collective label…by which persons are recognized by political actors as members of a political group." He goes on to specify that "political identities…indicate the populations with which political actors expect that person to be affiliated in contests over governing power and its use." This definition suffers from an overall lack of specificity regarding who these supposed political actors are and whether or not these supposed group members also recognize these political identities as such. By linking political identities to "contests over governing power and its use," moreover, Smith also seems to be linking political identity to elections, though this too remains vague.

that aim to understand identity politicization in its own right. How are we to study politicized identities as *outcomes* when our determination of that very politicization is based on post hoc assessments of that identity's "relevance" to some other outcome of interest to political scientists? What exactly, then, is identity politicization in and of itself? Without specifying some clear criteria by which to judge whether an identity is itself political/politicized, efforts to better understand these processes are likely to stall.

Despite its shortcomings, scholars have found this minimalist definition to be an attractive framework. Indeed, scholars need only hypothesize that a given social category is "relevant" to the political outcome or process in question to assert that it is political (and thus "politicized").[38] And because SIT rests on abstract laboratory experiments in social psychology, any category will do. In fact, the foundational laboratory-based studies in SIT stress that even individuals randomly assigned to arbitrary groups to which they have no prior attachments display the hypothesized psychological effects on individual-level behavior (the so-called minimal group paradigm).[39] The abstract and arbitrary nature of the memberships in these experiments has therefore allowed SIT to motivate hypotheses about the effects of virtually any group membership. SIT's agnosticism on which categories matter also allows the framework to comport with constructivist views that identities are constructed, malleable, and situational.[40]

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[38] In the words of Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" this approach treats political identities as "categories of analysis," rather than "categories of practice."

[39] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*; Turner et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group*. This is despite Tajfel's own definition of social identity which asserts "the value and emotional significance attached to the membership."

[40] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1969); Mara Loveman, "Is 'Race' Essential? A Comment on Bonilla-Silva," *American Sociological Review* 64, no. 6 (1999): 891–98; Kanchan Chandra, "Introduction," in *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*, ed. Kanchan Chandra (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). SIT's comportment with constructivist approaches to identity is perhaps most clearly illustrated in Abdelal et al., "Identity as a Variable," in which these authors implore scholars to take seriously within-group heterogeneity regarding the meaning of collective identities. This was a response to the tendency of scholars to take the existence of "groups" for-granted, as well as to treat group members' subjective understandings of their collective identities monolithically. The article was certainly a welcome intervention in the growing literature on identity. But the authors' focus on analytical

Yet these same features that make SIT so widely applicable also limit its utility for understanding how social identities may not simply be "relevant" to a given political outcome of theoretical interest, but may themselves become politicized and imbued with political meaning. As Huddy herself points out in critical reviews of the subject,[41] because SIT theorizes that one's simple awareness of social membership produces in-group bias and favoritism through cognitive— even subconscious,[42] some argue—mechanisms, the framework would predict politically relevant identities far more often than we observe them.[43] If arbitrary memberships with weak group ties were sufficient to produce the need for positive distinctiveness, as the minimal group paradigm suggests, then we should observe political claims and behaviors based on a wide range of identities in a wide range of circumstances. Yet the *absence* of politicization of socially salient and meaningful identities has itself become an object of fascination for political scientists. Indeed, we have remarked on this absence for decades, even when identity/cleavage politicization would seem overdetermined.[44] The scant real-world evidence for SIT's predictions of ubiquitous identity-driven behavior underscores that while SIT has been invaluable to understanding the psychological

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approach and heavy reliance on social identity theory does little to parse out differences between social and political identity, or to define in any concrete sense what merits labelling an identity "political." The article, therefore, does little to address the conceptual stretching under examination here.

[41] Huddy, "From Social to Political Identity"; Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion."

[42] Thierry Devos and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "Implicit Self and Identity," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1001, no. 1 (2003): 177–211.

[43] For a response and rebuttal to this critique, see Penelope Oakes, "Psychological Groups and Political Psychology: A Response to Huddy's 'Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory,'" *Political Psychology* 23, no. 4 (2002): 809–24; Leonie Huddy, "Context and Meaning in Social Identity Theory: A Response to Oakes," *Political Psychology* 23, no. 4 (2002): 825–38.

[44] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 715–35; John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Michael George Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*; David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Kenneth M. Roberts, "Social Inequalities without Class Cleavages in Latin America's Neoliberal Era," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36, no. 4 (2002): 3–33; Thad Dunning and Lauren Harrison, "Cross-Cutting Cleavages and Ethnic Voting: An Experimental Study of Cousinage in Mali," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010): 21.

mechanisms and underpinnings of this behavior once it is apparent, it is far less useful for making sense of variation in identity politicization between and among groups.[45]

I am not the first to offer these critiques of SIT, and many scholars, Huddy included, have called for greater scrutiny of the processes that translate social identities into political ones.[46] SIT will likely, and rightfully, remain foundational for studies of identity-based behavior and intergroup relations, but this framework does not offer the theoretical leverage to address major questions in the study of identity politics, namely, how exactly social identities become politicized, under what conditions this is likely to occur, and why. If we are to understand empirically the processes that lead to identity politicization, we must first develop a common understanding of what makes an identity political in the first place. It may well be the case that social and political identity are not mutually exclusive or wholly distinct from one another. But to say that any category of social membership *could* shape political behavior or outcomes as a social identity cannot be taken to mean all categories *will* necessarily do so. A critical step in advancing this theoretical agenda, then, is developing an explicit and clearly delimited conceptualization of what exactly constitutes political identity, how this type of identity is distinct from others, and where it sits in relation to them.

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[45] Studies in social psychology and political science have acknowledged this "social identity complexity" in the real world and its consequences, sometimes in the form of cross-pressures, for political behavior and the political salience of particular identities. Sonia Roccas and Marilynn B. Brewer, "Social Identity Complexity," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6, no. 2 (2002): 88–106; K. Jurée Capers and Candis Watts Smith, "Straddling Identities: Identity Cross-Pressures on Black Immigrants' Policy Preferences," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, no. 3 (2016): 393–424; Mala Htun, "Is Gender Like Ethnicity? The Political Representation of Identity Groups," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 3 (2004): 439–458.

[46] Huddy, "From Social to Political Identity"; Smith, "Identities, Interests, and the Future of Political Science"; Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link."

3. An Alternative Definition

The alternative conceptualization I propose is not defined mechanically based on identity content, nor in a post hoc manner based on the apparent relevance of a social category to a political outcome of interest. Instead, it shifts attention away from "categories of analysis" to "categories of practice," in Brubaker and Cooper's words.[47] This is to say that determining whether an identity is political ought to be an empirical assessment of the perspectives, meanings, and understandings that individuals themselves attribute to their identities, rather than categories deemed political by the analyst. In brief, I define political identities as *categories of social membership that inspire group consciousness and shape individuals' understandings of power relationships, broadly defined*. This definition can be unpacked into three key components, one analytical and two empirical:

1. Analytically, political *identities* crystallize at the individual—rather than group—level. Putative groups are internally heterogeneous, and a given category of social membership may constitute a political identity for some, but not necessarily all, members of the category.

2. Empirically, political identities entail group consciousness, which is more than a simple awareness of one's membership in a social group. It is a strong identification with and attachment to that group.

3. More specifically, this consciousness operates as a lens through which individuals interpret power relationships such that individuals believe that group members are disadvantaged by intergroup asymmetries of power.

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[47] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity.'"

Below I elaborate these components and use them to situate the concept relative to the related concepts of social identity and political cleavages.

Individuals in Groups

To say that political identities are individual-level phenomena is simply to say that they do not follow naturally or inevitably from the existence of a broader social group or identifiable collective. A key insight of constructivist scholarship is that individuals possess multiple and overlapping group memberships, any of which may constitute a political identity. Yet while a given identity may become political for some or most members of a group, it may not for all. This shift to the individual level of analysis draws on tendencies in social psychology to focus on the study of individuals *in* groups rather than of groups per se,[48] as well as the recent cognitive turn in the comparative ethnic politics literature, which treats social groups not as things in the world, but as ways of seeing the world.[49] Conceptualizing political identity as a microlevel phenomenon, therefore, will improve the study of why a given social category crystallizes for certain *individuals* to take on political meaning—in short, to become politicized.

Microlevel analysis helps resolve other theoretical and analytical concerns as well. First, centering the internal heterogeneity of groups avoids the analytical sin of "groupism," which implicitly presumes that groups, in the sociological sense of the word, are monolithic or preordained units of social analysis.[50] Instead, scholars ought consider the empirical referents of a given social category (who the presumed members are), and then determine empirically whether

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[48] Henri Tajfel, "Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour," *Social Science Information* 13, no. 2 (1974): 64. According to Tajfel, one aim of social identity research is "to emphasise [sic] the role of 'men in groups' rather than of men *tout court*."

[49] Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33, no. 1 (2004): 31–64.

[50] Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*.

this membership has taken the form outlined above for group members. Second, centering internal heterogeneity helps distinguish political identities from the related concept of political cleavages. The latter can be viewed as the macrolevel manifestation of microlevel political identities. In other words, if enough individuals assume political identities based on a social membership, then one might say members have cohered politically to form a cleavage.[51] Microlevel analysis offers analytical flexibility by allowing political identities to occupy a conceptual and empirical middle-ground between latent and politicized *cleavages*. Thus the formation of political *identities* and *cleavages* ought to be considered empirically distinct, if related, phenomena, each potentially deserving its own set of theoretical explanations.

Group Consciousness

Group consciousness distinguishes political from social identity. SIT theorizes that social identity operates via cognitive mechanisms of self-categorization and assumes some internalization of social categories,[52] though the in-group bias and favoritism social identity is said to produce emanates from the individual's simple awareness of her membership in a social group (the minimal group paradigm).[53] By contrast, group consciousness emanates not simply from awareness of membership; it entails a strong identification with and attachment to a social group such that the individual considers this membership an important part of how she understands herself.[54] In other words, one's membership is not simply a descriptive fact, it is an important part

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[51] Bartolini and Mair, *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability: The Stabilisation of European Electorates 1885-1985*, chap. 9.

[52] Turner et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group*, 51–52.

[53] Some social psychologists even contend that social group memberships exert their effects *sub*consciously. This is in contrast to group consciousness theory, which of course necessarily operates at a level of consciousness.

[54] For classic conceptualizations of group consciousness, see Gurin, Miller, and Gurin, "Stratum Identification and Consciousness"; Miller et al., "Group Consciousness and Political Participation"; Pamela Johnston Conover, "The Role of Social Groups in Political Thinking," *British Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 1 (1988): 51–76; Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link"; McClain et al., "Group Membership, Group Identity, and Group Consciousness."

of one's identity. As with political identity in general, many individuals in a social group might be aware of this membership, but it may not necessarily inspire group consciousness for all members. Despite the emphasis on the study of individuals in groups, SIT does not explicitly hypothesize heterogeneity in the effects of social membership on behavior according to the strength of one's identification. In contrast, group consciousness theory would expect a social membership to have distinct effects among those who strongly identify with their social groups, that is, for whom the social membership inspires group consciousness.

While consciousness has not always been central in studies of identity, it has featured in prominent studies of political behavior.[55] More recent studies have also begun to revive this dimension of identity. Notably, group consciousness is central to Cramer's recent study of rural Wisconsin,[56] and others have emphasized within-group heterogeneity to explain differences in political behavior.[57] Brady and Kaplan, for example, show how individual-level variation in ethnic identity "salience" explains Estonian political behavior.[58] And Valenzuela and Michelson show how identity-based appeals to mobilize Latino voters in the U.S. are moderated by the strength of

[55] Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Richard D. Shingles, "Black Consciousness and Political Participation: The Missing Link," *The American Political Science Review* 75, no. 1 (1981): 76–91.

[56] Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*.

[57] Scholars, for example, have long studied "consciousness" and "linked fate" in order to understand within-group differences in salience/importance of a given social membership to the individual. Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Jane Junn and Natalie Masuoka, "Asian American Identity: Shared Racial Status and Political Context," *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 4 (2008): 729–40; Janelle Wong et al., *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and Their Political Identities* (New York: Sage, 2011); Gladys Mitchell-Walthour, *The Politics of Blackness: Racial Identity and Political Behavior in Contemporary Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[58] Henry E. Brady and Cynthia S. Kaplan, "Categorically Wrong? Nominal versus Graded Measures of Ethnic Identity," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35, no. 3 (2000): 56–91; Henry E. Brady and Cynthia S. Kaplan, "Subjects to Citizens: From Non-Voting, to Protesting, to Voting in Estonia during the Transition to Democracy," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 32, no. 4 (2001): 347–78.

voters' "attachments to a politicized group identity."[59] Terminology varies,[60] but there is growing

recognition that self-classification alone may be too coarse a measure to capture linkages between

identity and behavior.[61] Closer attention to consciousness can remedy this oversight.

Perceptions of Power Relationships

Classic conceptions of group consciousness also incorporate the idea that group

consciousness relates specifically to the individual's beliefs about economic stratification and

relative deprivation, namely the individual's blame of the system for distributive injustice, as well

as the view that collective action is the best means of achieving the group's interests.[62] Dispensing

with these more narrow components of group consciousness theory, I argue for a broader

conception of political identity that relates consciousness to perceptions of power, struggles over

which anchor the study of politics, broadly speaking.[63] Following Dahl, I see power as relational

and as something one holds over others.[64] More specifically, then, an identity can be deemed

political when the individual is not only strongly attached to her group, but also believes that group

members are disadvantaged by intergroup asymmetries of power. In assessing one's political

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[59] Ali A. Valenzuela and Melissa R. Michelson, "Turnout, Status, and Identity: Mobilizing Latinos to Vote with Group Appeals," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 4 (2016): 616. Also see Atiya Kai Stokes, "Latino Group Consciousness and Political Participation," *American Politics Research* 31, no. 4 (2003): 361–78; Gabriel R. Sanchez, "The Role of Group Consciousness in Political Participation Among Latinos in the United States," *American Politics Research* 34, no. 4 (2006): 427–50. Within-group differences in identity "salience," "consciousness," and "linked fate" have also featured in studies of the political behavior of ethnic and racial groups in the U.S. in particular.

[60] See Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link," for a brush-clearing discussion of the various terminology used to describe within-group differences in identity salience.

[61] Taeku Lee, "Between Social Theory and Social Science Practice: Toward a New Approach to the Survey Measurement of 'Race,'" in *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Science Research*, ed. Rawi Abdelal et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33–71.

[62] Gurin, Miller, and Gurin, "Stratum Identification and Consciousness"; Miller et al., "Group Consciousness and Political Participation."

[63] As Morgenthau famously proclaimed, "International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power." One can easily dispense of course with Morgenthau's preoccupation with international politics. Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948), 13.

[64] In Dahl's words, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do." Robert A. Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2, no. 3 (1957): 202–3.

identity, the *empirical* questions to be answered, then, are: what identity (or identities), if any, serves as the basis on which one makes sense of power, or whether a given identity of theoretical interest has become imbued with political meaning such that it operates as a lens for the individual's interpretation of power.

Though power is itself a contested concept, a self-consciously broad understanding of power can unite the varied usages of political identity. Particularly useful are Lukes' three dimensions of power,[65] which can be summarized simplistically as decision-making,[66] agenda-setting,[67] and manipulation or hegemony.[68] Scholars might incorporate alternative conceptions of power (or status) instead;[69] what matters in this conceptualization is that political identity be viewed as the individual's group-based understanding of power. Surely, relying on a contested concept will generate criticism, but it is precisely in the flexibility of the concept of power, as well as its centrality in the study of politics, that allows it to encompass the wide-ranging definitions of political identity currently in use in the literature. Indeed, struggles over power could just as easily describe electoral politics and competition for resources as it can social mobilization, nationalist violence, and interstate war.

It is also important to emphasize that understandings of power are perceptual and subjective, and individuals' beliefs about power may not find empirical support or conform to

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[65] Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[66] Dahl, "The Concept of Power"; Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).
[67] Peter Bachrachand and Morton S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4 (1962): 947–52.
[68] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (International Publishers, 1971). For a discussion of Lukes' three dimensions of power, see Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, chap. 1.
[69] E.g., Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

common views about which groups are marginalized or disadvantaged. The empirical basis for these views is less relevant than the individual's *belief* that they are true. Like Campbell et al.'s "perceptual screen,"[70] political identities can determine which facts and sources of information are deemed legitimate and true,[71] thereby complicating "rational" explanations for identity-based preferences and behavior;[72] and groups who dominate halls of power, like oligarchic elites or ethnoracial minorities, might fear the loss of power due to numerical disadvantage, despite their status quo control. Such notions are central to elites' fears in formal theories of democratization,[73] as well as to group position theory and symbolic racism, in which groups sitting atop a social hierarchy seek to defend their symbolic status and relative positions in society.[74] Thus analysts may not agree that members of a given group suffer from power asymmetries, and even individuals belonging to groups not commonly seen as marginalized/dominated can develop the belief that they suffer from disadvantage due to changing contexts, norms, or values.[75] Nonetheless, centering the study of political identities around individuals' group-based understandings of power can unite the varied usages of the concept around an elemental feature of politics itself, and helps to specify the empirical manifestations of political identity as a category of practice.

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[70] Campbell et al., *The American Voter*.

[71] Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*; Bartels, "Beyond the Running Tally."

[72] Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*.

[73] Carles Boix, *Democracy and Redistribution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ben W. Ansell and David J. Samuels, *Inequality and Democratization: An Elite-Competition Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[74] Herbert Blumer, "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position," *The Pacific Sociological Review* 1, no. 1 (1958): 3–7; Donald R. Kinder and David O. Sears, "Prejudice and Politics: Symbolic Racism versus Racial Threats to the Good Life," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40, no. 3 (1981): 414; Lawrence D. Bobo, "Prejudice as Group Position: Microfoundations of a Sociological Approach to Racism and Race Relations," *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 3 (1999): 445–72.

[75] Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016); Abrajano and Hajnal, *White Backlash*.

4. Illustrating the Concept: Insight from Racial Identities in Brazil

To demonstrate these empirical manifestations, I present discourse analysis of in-depth interview data from Brazil. Comparisons of individuals—all of whom share the same racial identification but diverge in whether this inspires consciousness and shapes perceptions of power—highlight political identity as an individual-level phenomenon. To be clear, I am not presenting these data to make empirical claims about the broader Brazilian population. Nor do I offer them as "evidence" that political identity is real, or suggest that political identity shares a particular affinity with racial categories. These data are intended to illustrate the concrete, observable manifestations of the concept, and how we might go about assessing whether an identity, in and of itself, is indeed political. Finally, in the analysis I discuss both racial and class identities. The point of this is not to determine which one matters more for these individuals; it is that, with regard to race, all interview subjects exhibit the attributes of social identity (feelings of social belonging), but not necessarily political identity (strong group attachments and group-based understandings of power).

I conducted these interviews in São Paulo in 2016 and 2017 as part of a larger study on the processes of identity politicization. Interview subjects were snowball-sampled from contacts I made while conducting participant observation in university preparatory courses offered by local organizations and while a visiting researcher at the University of São Paulo (USP). While Brazil is known for its history of race mixture and the fluidity of racial boundaries, all of the individuals introduced below self-identify as black.[76]

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[76] All of the individuals presented in this analysis accept both labels *preto* and *negro* in Portuguese, even though they differ in the terminology they prefer to use to describe themselves in racial terms.

Black Identification and Group Consciousness

SIT suggests that individuals' attachments to social groups operate through psychological mechanisms of categorization to generate, in part, feelings of social belonging. I argued above that political identity entails attachments to social groups that take a heightened form, in which individuals are not just aware of their social memberships, but strongly identify with groups. Regarding their racial identities, the Brazilians I spoke with varied in this respect. Some demonstrated a clear sense of racial awareness and similarity, but this did little to generate strong feelings of attachment to other category members. Others saw the very act of identification as something that made them feel part of a collective and even inspired solidarity with other group members.

Consider Nilton, a 35-year-old electrician whom I met while observing a preparatory course for Brazil's university entrance exam. Like many students, Nilton was there "to get a scholarship, to get a slot at university. To be able to study." Nilton reports that he felt comfortable and at ease in the course, saying that "everyone speaks the same language. Everyone lives not in the same place but in the same situation." Clear in our conversation is that a large part of Nilton's positive experience came from his sense of identification with other students in the course: "Everyone there lives on the periphery, everybody there—some have no income, you see? Everybody lives on the periphery, they're the poor, a lot of, a lot of blacks. A lot, right? There are a lot of blacks."

As SIT would describe, Nilton has demarcated a "we" that inspires a clear sense of belonging. Race is clearly part of this belonging for Nilton. He demonstrates an awareness of racial similarity to others in the class, and by emphasizing the number of blacks in the course, which is free and oriented toward those unable to afford private courses, he implicitly links blackness to

lower class status. Yet Nilton's self-understanding as black does not inspire group consciousness. Consider how he imagines a hypothetical scenario in which the course were comprised of mostly whites:

> DD: And, so, you said that you feel comfortable because you're all from the same social class, and [in the course] the majority [of students] are black. I think there are a few white students. I'm not sure, maybe *morenos claros* [people with lighter skin], and I'm there too. But, does this also make a difference for you, the fact that it's majority black?
>
> Nilton: Yeah.
>
> DD: Yeah…
>
> Nilton: Yeah, I think that's what I said before. I think that because, like, you feel more comfortable, you see? What I said before, when you're in a class where the people are the same, your thinking is the same, your goal is the same…I think you feel more comfortable, you see? You have more freedom.
>
> DD: And, if there were a lot of white students there, would that change things for you?
>
> Nilton: So I think, like…I think…it depends. For example, if it was all whites from [my] same class, I think no. Now, if it was, for example, whites from upper classes…middle class, upper class…I think that would change [things], yeah. If everybody was from the periphery, I think it wouldn't.
>
> DD: Ah. So the fact of being from the periphery is more important—
>
> Nilton: —more important than color.
>
> DD: Than color…
>
> Nilton: People from the periphery are all the same.

Though race is a component of Nilton's feelings of social belonging, its importance is subordinated to class. In other words, while Nilton is clearly aware of race, racial difference alone is not enough to compromise his feelings of belonging, which are rooted more deeply in his self-understanding as a "peripheral" resident in São Paulo.[77]

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[77] Nilton's comments are suggestive that his class identity might constitute a political identity—a strong attachment to others living in the urban periphery that shapes how he understands power. In my interviews, however, I did not explore class identities in the same depth as I did racial identities and therefore cannot fully make this claim. Nonetheless, his comments here are reminiscent of what one might expect to hear if his class identity constituted a political identity.

Roberta, a 42-year-old cook also enrolled in this preparatory course, expressed similar

ideas. Roberta is originally from Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia, but moved to São Paulo in

the southeast as a teenager to work as a domestic worker. Roberta learned to read at thirteen and

completed high school as an adult. We are having our conversation in the café of a bookstore in a

middle-class neighborhood in São Paulo when Roberta echoes Nilton's sentiments:

> DD: You said that in situations where you're the only black person you feel uncomfortable…
>
> Roberta: Because there still is a lot of prejudice in our country, racial prejudice.
>
> DD: So, for example, in this bookstore there are a lot of white people so are you feeling something [racist] can happen to you?
>
> Roberta: No. Because here I see that they are people that aren't of such a high social class, so I won't suffer so much. Now, if it were a white, upper class society, I would suffer, yes. I wouldn't even be seen. I'd be trash, more or less, you see?

Roberta, too, is clearly aware of racial differences, remarking on race-based feelings of discomfort.

But, like Nilton, racial difference alone is insufficient to make Roberta feel dissimilar to whites.

Roberta's weak attachment to blacks as a social group is also evident in the language she

chooses to identify as black and the meaning she attributes to this identification. Brazilians possess

rich lexicons to describe racial differences, generally corresponding to skin tone.[78] One

consequence is that colloquialisms often deviate from the official categories employed by the state.

Roberta, for example, describes herself using *negra*—an increasingly common word promoted by

Brazil's black movement that seeks to create a collective black identity for all Afro-descendants,[79]

though it is not always employed with this motivation. Also common is the term *moreno*, a softer

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[78] Marvin Harris, "Racial Identity in Brazil," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 1, no. 2 (1964): 21–28; Oracy Nogueira, *Preconceito de marca: as relações raciais em Itapetininga* (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1998); Edward E. Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[79] Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*; Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Telles, *Race in Another America*; Stanley R. Bailey, *Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes, and Politics in Brazil* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

word roughly meaning "dark," but that is notoriously ambiguous and euphemistic.[80] Brazil's census, by contrast, sorts nonwhites into brown (*pardo*) and black (*preto*) categories,[81] which many understand to indicate skin tone, rather than descent.[82] Yet in everyday parlance, the census category *preto* offends some, is generally stigmatized, and can even be deployed as a slur. I ask Roberta what she thinks about these differences:

> Roberta: I prefer *negra*.
>
> DD: How come?
>
> Roberta: I don't know…I think it's more…I don't know.
> DD: Normal?
>
> Roberta: I think it's more normal.
>
> DD: Do you find the word *preta* offensive?
>
> Roberta: No, it's the same thing as 'white.' Is 'white' offensive? [Laughter]
>
> DD: So, for you, what does it mean to be *negra*?
>
> Roberta: I'm a person like any other. The difference is the tone of my skin, but this doesn't mean that I'm different from another person with light skin.

Roberta has a straightforward and uncomplicated view of race and racial identification. She claims to see no major differences between *negro* and *preto*, and overlooks the stigma and negative connotations attached to the word *preto*. Moreover, Roberta is aware of racial differences, evidenced by her awareness of racial discrimination above, and classifies herself as black based on a matter-of-fact reasoning—the tone of her skin. Yet this classification conjures little notion of group consciousness. Roberta relates her blackness to her being "a person," rather than a member

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[80] Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971); Nelson do Valle Silva, "Morenidade: Modo de Usar," *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 30 (1996): 79–95; Telles, *Race in Another America*.
[81] The Brazilian census also includes Asian and indigenous categories.
[82] Nogueira, *Preconceito de marca*.

of a social group larger than herself, and emphasizes her similarity to—rather than difference from—the lighter-skinned.

Contrast Roberta with Yasmin, a 35-year-old employee at a public sector bank in São Paulo, whom I met while observing a course on race relations offered by the black movement. Yasmin is rather light-skinned, and many in Brazil might not consider her black, but Yasmin wears her hair in bright, purple braids—unmistakably, it seems, to draw attention to her hair—and identifies emphatically as a black woman. Unlike Roberta, Yasmin prefers to use the word *preta* rather than *negra* when she identifies: "Generally I say 'I'm a *preta* woman.' I don't say 'I'm a *negra* woman' because *preta* causes…I think it calls—because it shocks more when I say it…'I am a *preta* woman.' And that's my intention." Yasmin goes on to explain the shock value of self-identifying in this way:

> First because people don't want to see me as black. Seeing me as black is already hard because they want to see me as *morena*. […] And when I say I'm a *preta* woman…it's heavier. They get uncomfortable when I confront [them] and say I'm a *preta* woman. I think that it's, I think the impact is greater in society when I say I'm a *preta* woman. It's more uncomfortable and they don't get to react. Sometimes when I say I'm a *negra* woman there's someone who says 'no, you're *morena*,' and I don't want them to have that response. I don't want to anymore because I'm in that phase, like, I don't want to just resist. I want to announce 'I am a *preta* woman in a racist society!'

Whereas Roberta prefers *negra* because it's "normal" and sees herself as no different from others with lighter skin, Yasmin chooses *preta* with the explicit goal of drawing attention to racial difference and countering others' attempts to emphasize the whiteness of her appearance and downplay her blackness.

The contrast between Roberta and Yasmin illustrates the internal contestation over the meaning of blackness that Abdelal and colleagues describe.[83] But the differences between these two women are greater than mere divergence in their understandings of black identity. For Roberta,

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[83] Abdelal et al., "Identity as a Variable."

blackness, the tone of her skin, is simply one way to describe her physical appearance as an *individual*; for Yasmin, blackness is something that binds her to other blacks in Brazilian society. This is clear in the way Yasmin justifies her understanding of blackness, which she defines as "fighting for survival all the time, isn't it? Because you have to fight. It's resistance." Yet as a public sector employee, Yasmin experienced impressive upward mobility in her lifetime and now earns an enviable salary in Brazil, of which she is acutely aware. To justify her understanding of blackness as the fight for survival, Yasmin puts herself in collective struggle with a social group, even if she herself does not suffer as do her fellow group members: "and I say this from a very, very privileged position, you know? So, it's a life that's very different from mine because—that's the thing—because today I don't need to fight to survive, but I understand that the large part of black people still do, you see?" For Yasmin, identifying as black is as much an affirmation of her own individual self-understanding, as well as a reflection of her attachment to a social group larger than herself. Thus blackness might inspire a sense of social belonging (social identity) for both Yasmin and Roberta, but the group consciousness that anchors political identity is evident only for Yasmin.

Paulo, a 19-year-old student at USP, also exhibits racial group consciousness. Paulo grew up and lives in a peripheral community in the west zone of São Paulo and, like Yasmin, prefers the word *preto* rather than *negro* to describe his racial identity, explaining that *preto* "is stronger politically." He goes on: "there was always this idea of *preto* being bad. 'Ah, the *preto* was a slave.' We're black, but we aren't slaves anymore because slavery was abolished, but we still have legacies from that system […] So that's why [I choose *preto*], to break with the horrible stereotype that *preto* is bad."

Paulo's racial identification is laden with his desire to confront and counter the stigma attached to the word *preto* and its historical roots in slavery. To be sure, Paulo, who is dark-skinned and who wears his hair in the style of an afro, would likely be considered black by many in and out of Brazil. But unlike Roberta, Paulo makes no references to his physical appearance when he identifies and instead sees the act of identification itself as an articulation of his solidarity with other blacks. This is particularly clear in the way he speaks in terms of "we" when he makes reference to both the negative consequences of racial stigma as well as the legacies of slavery in present-day Brazil. Like Yasmin, identifying as black for Paulo is about more than just placing oneself into a category; it is about belonging to a group that shares a past and present.

Examination of individuals' racial identifications and how they understand and define blackness illuminates how individuals of the same social category exhibit varying levels of group consciousness. For Nilton and Roberta, blackness may at times contribute to their feelings of social belonging (social identity), but this identification does little to inspire connection to other blacks as a group (political identity), as it does for Yasmin and Paulo. Moreover, for Roberta black identification is a straightforward matter of classification, whereas for Yasmin and Paulo this conjures strong attachments to groups larger than themselves, which gives rise to the view that they suffer along with other group members, even when their personal experiences might be strikingly different. Their understandings of blackness—and even the specific words they use to describe it—are linked to the collective struggles they believe black people face in Brazil.

Racialized Understandings of Power

Individuals vary not only in the degree of their group attachments, but also in whether social memberships shape their understandings of power relationships. The Brazilians I spoke with

varied in the extent to which they understood their ability to get ahead in society, the willingness of the state to repress members of certain racial groups, and how Brazil's official history of peacefully abolishing slavery sought to erase the hardships uniquely suffered by Afro-descendants and ignore the legacies of this institution for understanding present-day inequalities. Those who made sense of these issues through their racial identities often spoke about the reproduction of these inequalities and injustices through the social forces of racism. In contrast, those who did not interpret the world through their racial identities recognized that racial inequalities existed, but did not see their—or other members'—lives inhibited by them or reproduced through racism.

In the course of our conversation, Roberta and I are discussing whether or not she believes the black movement-linked NGO where we met, was in fact a "black" organization. Though this may seem incredible, many students enrolled in the course simply because it was free and were not aware that the organization was one with a race-based mission. Roberta, however, agrees that it is and explains:

> Roberta: Because it's more geared toward the needy population, the movement to help more humble people.
>
> DD: And you think black people are more needy here in Brazil?
>
> Roberta: Yes, of course. Statistically speaking, blacks are still disadvantaged, yes.
>
> DD: Do you notice [racial inequality] day to day?
>
> Roberta: I do, day to day.
>
> DD: How?
>
> Roberta: Like, for example, you go to the hospital, there you see 10 doctors, among those 10 doctors only 1 is black.

By explaining that targeting poverty is what makes the organization "black" in her view, Roberta implies here that blackness and poverty are intertwined and almost synonymous. Moreover, Roberta's comments here demonstrate her awareness of racial inequality, in this case in the scarcity

of nonwhites in elite professions—a casual observation supported by mountains of empirical evidence.[84] Yet for Roberta, such inequalities are statistics, not social barriers or forces shaping her life trajectory. Later in the conversation, we return to the question of racial inequality and what Roberta makes of this:

> DD: When you enter a place, do you notice an absence of blacks in higher positions?
>
> Roberta: There is still a difference. You still see a lot of this.
>
> DD: How does this affect you?
>
> Roberta: It doesn't affect me.
>
> DD: But you notice it?
>
> Roberta: Yeah, it's visible.
>
> DD: And, seeing a black doctor, do you identify with that person?
>
> Roberta: I identify and I feel happy. 'Look, it's already changing. Look, that's great.' I feel happy.

Despite her awareness of racial inequality, Roberta's black identification does not shape her understanding of economic power. She states frankly that racial inequality is visible. Yet when confronted with instances of what could be interpreted as barriers to her own social mobility—that is, using the underrepresentation of blacks as a heuristic for her own chances of success—Roberta sees this as an isolated case to be celebrated and one that inspires optimism, not pessimism.[85] Moreover, despite encountering racial inequality day-to-day—something that one might use to

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[84] Carlos A. Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1979); Carlos A. Hasenbalg, "Race and Socioeconomic Inequalities in Brazil," in *Race, Class and Power in Brazil*, ed. Pierre-Michel Fontaine (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies University of California, Los Angeles, 1985), 25–41; Nelson do Valle Silva, "Updating the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil," in *Race, Class and Power in Brazil*, ed. Pierre-Michel Fontaine (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1985), 42–55; George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); George Reid Andrews, "Racial Inequality in Brazil and the United States: A Statistical Comparison," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 2 (1992): 229–63; Nelson do Valle Silva, "A Research Note on the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35, no. 2 (2000): 18–27; Telles, *Race in Another America*; George Reid Andrews, "Racial Inequality in Brazil and the United States, 1990-2010," *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 4 (2014): 829–54; Edward E. Telles, *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
[85] Dawson, *Behind the Mule*; Mitchell-Walthour, *The Politics of Blackness*.

legitimize the need to politicize race—Roberta insists that she herself is not a victim of these forces. At one point in our conversation, I ask Roberta if her experiences with racism are different in the southeast of Brazil (where she lives) than in the northeast (where she spent her childhood), but Roberta reports that she has not experienced racism anywhere:

> DD: Here in São Paulo, in your experience, you didn't suffer more racism [than in the northeast]?
>
> Roberta: No, not in Bahia either. If I were to say that I've suffered from racism? No. But there is [racism]. But I haven't suffered.
>
> DD: What do you mean, like, there is [racism] but you haven't suffered?
>
> Roberta: Because you see…you can see it in the statistics. Does it exist? Of course it exists.

Roberta's response to statistical indicators of racial inequality is that this "of course" must be explained by racism. But Roberta does not infer from this that as a self-identifying black person she, too, must suffer from racism. Instead, Roberta believes that her social class and education will be key to her economic success and ability to escape discrimination:

> DD: So you said that there is racism, there is racial prejudice but that maybe you didn't suffer so much [from this]. And you said that you don't think your color affects your ability to get a good job. So, if prejudice exists, why doesn't it affect your ability to get a good job?
>
> Roberta: Because to get a good job I have to, I have to have education. I have to have a university degree. So it's not going to affect me.
>
> DD: So, like, considering the level of education that you have, you don't suffer [from racism]?
>
> Roberta: Considering the level of education…
>
> DD: Like, the—
>
> Roberta: —No. No, I don't suffer really. Because people know [my education level]. You're there, they've got to respect you. Like it or not, it's mandatory. So I'm not going to suffer prejudice.

Regardless of whether Roberta suffers discrimination due to race, class, or something else, she *believes* that university education—a salient marker of social class in Brazil—will provide new and better opportunities for her in the labor market. For Roberta, then, her racial identification does little to shape her understanding of Brazil's social structure and her belief that she can get ahead

in life, despite claiming that racial inequalities, the statistics of which she is clearly aware, are evidence of racial discrimination. In Roberta's case, then, self-identification as black is *not* a basis on which she makes sense of power relationships or how this affects her life.

In contrast, Yasmin's interpretation of racial inequality and racism is strongly influenced by her racial identification. Whereas Roberta sees class mobility as an escape-hatch, Yasmin, who in fact escaped poverty and now lives comfortably, sees racism as an inescapable social force. She is cognizant of her privileged status, but "hate[s] the word meritocracy" because "it presupposes that people start from the same point." Yasmin attributes her current job as a well-paid civil servant to a stroke of luck:

> People say that [getting my job] was my merit. I say 'no, it wasn't my merit.' Because when I signed up for the [civil servant exam] my sister did too. She was always better than me in school. Always. She always got better grades than me. Why did I pass and she didn't? So that's how it is. It's a combination of factors, you know? […] I didn't know half of [the answers on] the exam. I guessed a letter. If it worked out, you know, then it isn't merit. I don't have merit because of this.

For Yasmin, landing a highly competitive and well paid job—what might be a point of pride and accomplishment—is proof that black Brazilians are *not* rewarded for their merit and are instead trapped by structural disadvantage. She sees her own success as pure luck, which her hard-working sister is unlikely to experience: "[w]hile I was able to leave that cycle of [economic] violence, my sisters never will. They are there, at the bottom, you know?" And while she makes a distinction between class and race-based barriers to upward mobility, for Yasmin her own experiences of upward mobility have only deepened her beliefs that race is a barrier to that mobility, in contrast to Roberta's view that upward mobility is the ultimate solution:

> So, for example, when I entered the bank, I think I escaped the cycle of economic violence. Obviously the racial [cycle] I can never escape, but from the economic [cycle] I think I escaped from the moment that I started to earn more [money], frequent other places. And then you start to notice, like, we go to some places, there are no black people. You go to another, no black people. You got to a restaurant, no black people. You get on a plane to go to Europe, almost no black people. Families of all black people? Impossible, depending on the destination. So then I began to realize this, that there were no black people.

Whereas for Roberta racial inequality is a "statistic," for Yasmin it is a "cycle of violence," one that upward mobility will not end. Notice here, too, that Yasmin cites the absence of other blacks in upper class spaces, which she begins to frequent as she earns more money, as evidence of this cycle of violence—an interpretation that departs sharply from Roberta's optimistic observation that whites far outnumber blacks in high-status occupations.

For Yasmin, the economic and racial violence that Yasmin sees in the world informs even her understanding of what it means to be black. Roberta describes her blackness as the tone of her skin. But for Yasmin, being black "is fighting for survival all the time, isn't it? Because you have to fight…it's resistance." She goes on:

> I think today being black is knowing you're on the bottom. The bottom of the pyramid, economically, all the way down, right? At the bottom…at the bottom. And it's knowing that there is a genocide of the black population. It's fighting for your children to survive and, it's, honestly I think being black today is fighting for survival all the time.

It is common in Brazil for those active in the black movement to characterize the high homicide and mortality rates among nonwhite Brazilians, above all at the hands of the police, as genocide.[86] Yasmin's invocation of the term and her understanding of blackness as defined by structural inequalities and the fight for survival strongly demonstrate the way that her black identity shapes her understanding of power: in her view, economic power and the coercive apparatus of the state are both deployed in ways keep black Brazilians trapped in a racial "cycle of violence." For Yasmin, blackness is one way she makes sense of this violence.

Interpreting the world through a racial lens can shape one's interpretation of not just economic and coercive power, but also cultural power that influences taken-for-granted facts and

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[86] Abdias Nascimento, *O Genocídio do negro brasileiro: processo de um racismo mascarado* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva S.A., 2016).

commonsense. For Paulo, who studied history in university, making sense of the world through his racial identity leads him to a political interpretation of Brazil's official historical narrative, which downplays the details of slavery as an institution. Consider how Paulo – now well-versed in the history of slavery, the country's long record of slave revolts, and maroon communities known as *quilombos* – reflects back on his history lessons in public high school:

> [About] slavery I [learned] a few things, but not much. Like, I knew that there was slavery. I knew more or less the time period, but it was very…superficial, the lessons about this. I didn't know what slavery was like and a lot of times I never learned for example that there were [slave] revolts. For example, the most important was the *Quilombo dos Palmares* with Zumbi, and I didn't know about it. I came to know about it. I didn't know for example what happened after abolition, for example. After abolition came the Republic, and we heard nothing more about blacks in the Republic. And the blacks were there.

Paulo sees how he was taught about Brazilian history, particularly regarding the country's fraught relationship with slavery, as part of an effort to downplay—or erase—the insidious details of this institution and its long-term consequences for blacks. Glória, a university student whom I met at another organization in São Paulo, articulates a similar view regarding the official history of the abolition of slavery, as well as what she sees as a false equivalence between migrants who arrived to Brazil through enslavement (Africans) and those who were offered material and economic incentives to immigrate (Europeans).[87] In our conversation, Glória describes the consequences of this historical depiction of blacks in Brazilian public schools:

> In high school, I learned just that blacks were enslaved and that they [were beaten], and that's it. If you take a book from primary school, you'll notice they dedicate two paragraphs with a picture of a black man being whipped. And we learn that Princess Isabel [the reigning monarch] freed [the slaves] and full stop. That's what we learn and nothing more. You grow up learning that there was slavery in Brazil, but that's it. That the Italians also migrated here, suffered here. So the image that's spread is that everybody suffered. Except that they don't show the suffering of each ethnicity, each people. So the idea that's cultivated is that everybody suffered, that everybody can get ahead if they want. 'Look where the Italians are. Look where the Germans are. Why haven't the blacks [accomplished this]? Because they didn't want to. Because they didn't want to work. Because they really are lazy bums.' And so you watch TV and the whole time they show this. Who's stealing, assaulting? Who's in jail? You see a black guy and think 'lord, black guys only.' So it's all a

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[87] Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974); George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

structural process, isn't it? Of alienation. Of trying to spread an image of something that really isn't how it was.

Glória echoes Paulo's view that the lived experience of black Brazilians is omitted from the country's official historical narrative—and even worse, that the omission is made deliberately to discredit grievances stemming from racial inequality and legitimize negative portrayals and stereotypes of black people. Rather than view "history" as a mere set of facts, both Paulo and Glória interpret Brazil's official history as one that reproduces racial inequality and discrimination more broadly by constructing a commonsense that ignores the plight of black people. For both Paulo and Glória, then, their strong attachments to blacks as a social group is one basis on which they make sense of cultural and symbolic power, and the relative social positions of blacks in Brazil.

5. Conclusion

The discussion and analyses in this article have drawn attention to group consciousness and perceptions of power at the individual level, criteria which I argue ought to distinguish political identity as a concept. The analysis of interview data above illustrates how to apply this conceptual and analytical framework to identify the manifestations of these criteria empirically, showing how racial identities can take on different meanings across individuals who share the same self-identification. In this example, black identification generated the sense of belonging SIT describes. For Nilton and Roberta, however, this did *not* generate strong group attachments or shape their interpretations of power between black and non-black Brazilians, or even their own individual positions in society. For Paulo and Yasmin, by contrast, racial identification did more than conjure notions of belonging; it generated a strong sense of attachment to others in their racial group, and profoundly shaped how they made sense of economic, coercive, and symbolic power in Brazilian

society, even admitting at times that they personally may not have suffered in the ways they described.

Social identity theory, the dominant theoretical framework in the study of identity in political science, struggles to account for or to make sense of these within-group differences. SIT expects groups members to exhibit feelings of social belonging, and indeed they do. But SIT does not theorize, and nor can it explain, the formation of group consciousness rooted in a given social category, or the specific kinds of identity-based perspectives this ought to entail. And because it operates through the mechanism of simple self-identification, SIT offers no analytical leverage in accounting for individual-level variation in whether these identities become politicized, in any meaningful sense of the word.

Above and beyond addressing the fundamental issues related to conceptual stretching, the conceptualization I offer in this article also offers the potential to improve the analytical rigor of analyses of identity politicization by providing an analytical framework to identify and study political identities *empirically*. On offer in this analysis is an illustration of how to determine whether a given social category of theoretical interest has *itself* become politicized, without necessarily linking this empirical phenomenon to some other political outcome (party support, voter behavior, social mobilization, attitudes in public opinion, to name a few). It accomplishes this by casting political identity as a category of practice, insisting that the analyst's designation of an identity as "political" is fundamentally an empirical claim that merits substantiation as part and parcel of the theoretical goal of understanding diverse forms of identity politicization.

This matters not only because the logic behind prior conceptualizations has largely gone unelaborated and unjustified in extant scholarship, but because political identities are themselves objects of study in major research agendas that span subfields in political science, agendas that

aim to understand when and why identities become politicized.[88] Indeed, in an influential article, Taeku Lee sought to reorient the study of identity in political science around the "identity-to-politics link," calling for scholars to pay closer attention to identity politicization as a set of distinct, if interrelated, processes.[89] This was a welcome and fruitful intervention, but it is hard to see how we can advance this theoretical agenda without clear and explicit criteria for what makes an identity political in the first place, that is, without a common understanding of what the empirical manifestations of political identity are, or without a coherent framework for empirical analysis that can be applied widely to various social categories.

This alternative framework thus serves current agendas by filling an existing gap, but it could also *broaden* these agendas by providing analytical and empirical tools that can lead to new questions regarding identity politicization. Common in political science are studies that aim to understand "cleavage" politicization in electoral politics,[90] the identity/demographic correlates of

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[88] Huddy, "From Social to Political Identity"; Smith, "Identities, Interests, and the Future of Political Science"; Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link"; Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*; Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba*; Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*; Dawson, *Behind the Mule*; Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*; Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*; Roberts, "Social Inequalities without Class Cleavages in Latin America's Neoliberal Era"; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*; Daniel N. Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Dunning and Harrison, "Cross-Cutting Cleavages and Ethnic Voting: An Experimental Study of Cousinage in Mali"; John D. Huber, *Exclusion by Elections: Inequality, Ethnic Identity, and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[89] Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link."

[90] Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba*; Bartolini and Mair, *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability: The Stabilisation of European Electorates 1885-1985*; Roberts, "Social Inequalities without Class Cleavages in Latin America's Neoliberal Era"; Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*.

political attitudes and behavior,[91] the formation and success of identity-based political parties,[92] or the emergence of identity-based social movements,[93] all as outcomes that indicate politicized identities. These are worthwhile agendas, to be sure, but in these analyses understanding the formation of political identities is often ancillary (if addressed) and subordinated to the primary theoretical task of identifying the link between identities and other outcomes of greater interest (i.e., electoral politics, social mobilization, public opinion formation, etc.). Yet taking seriously the identity-to-politics link requires that we focus attention on how political identities themselves come into formation. By providing the tools to place political identity formation at the center of our analyses, this alternative framework could open the door to new theorizing on identity politicization, which would include, but not be limited to, the following questions: What are the causes and mechanisms that imbue social categories with political meaning at the individual level? Why do social identities become political identities for *some* members of a group but not others? Is this more likely to occur for some types of identities more than others? Under what conditions, why, and how do political *identities* scale up and cohere to form political *cleavages*? Once formed, how do political identities find expression in certain political venues and arenas? And when do venues and institutions of political voice, representation, and articulation effectively channel political identities/cleavages, when do they not, and with what consequences?

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[91] Hajnal and Lee, *Why Americans Don't Join the Party*; Valenzuela and Michelson, "Turnout, Status, and Identity"; Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu, "Do Voters Dislike Working-Class Candidates? Voter Biases and the Descriptive Underrepresentation of the Working Class," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 4 (2016): 832–44; Huddy, Mason, and Horwitz, "Political Identity Convergence"; Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo, "Social Exclusion and Political Identity"; Huber, *Exclusion by Elections*; Natália S. Bueno and Thad Dunning, "Race, Resources, and Representation: Evidence from Brazilian Politicians," *World Politics* 69, no. 2 (2017): 327–65; Lauren D. Davenport, *Politics Beyond Black and White: Biracial Identity and Attitudes in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[92] Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Raul L. Madrid, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[93] McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*; Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*.

In short, variants of political identity formation are worthy of dedicated attention not simply because they relate to other political outcomes of interest, but because they can help us to disaggregate and problematize the dialectic interactions between identities and politics, interest in which is unlikely to wane in the years to come. The approach I advocate for here is perhaps more ambitious and asks for a greater level of attention from researchers, but it is sure to bring about more dynamic and meaningful insights into the powerful roles identities play in shaping politics and vice versa. In other words, without a proper conceptualization of political identity, efforts to develop fuller understandings of the identity-to-politics link will likely be stymied by our own conceptual stretching, at the cost of developing more complete understandings of identity politics and its consequences.