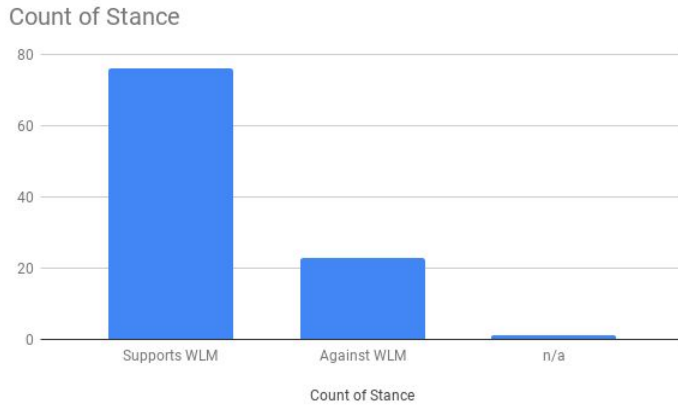


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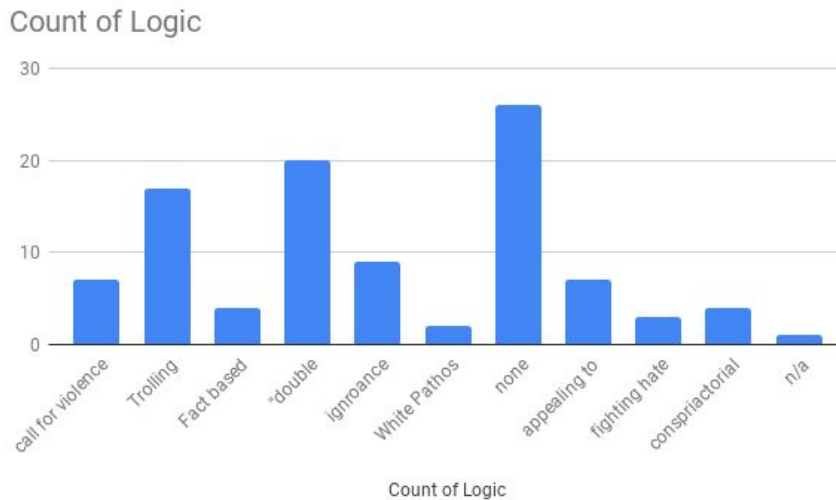
2020 has been a very turbulent year so far with the latest shock to the system being widespread protest across the US and the world speaking out against systemic racism from law enforcement and the system at large. The Black Lives Matter movement has been at the forefront in the fight for equality with growing support ever since 2013 after the death of Trayvon Martin. Social tensions have been on the rise within the US for a variety of reasons, chiefly the fight for gender and racial equality has been prominent this past decade, as Generation Z has come of age with an increasingly radical leftist mindset. With this, an equally radical right wing movement has arisen to counter it. Since the rise of Black Lives Matter, white nationalist, or the alt-right has kept pace with significant milestones as the election of Donald Trump, the Charlottesville riots, and a surge of violent mass shootings against minority groups (Pulse Nightclub, the Pittsburgh Synagogue, and the El Paso Shooting to name a few). Many of these shootings were orchestrated by right wing radicals over social media. Platforms like Twitter, 4chan, and 8chan are home to communities of white nationalists that create bubbles of extremist content that radicalize more moderate conservatives. Through the collection of the data on the twitter hashtag *WhitelivesMatter*, I have done grounded research connecting the movement with notions of fear mongering, societal delusions and calls for violence.

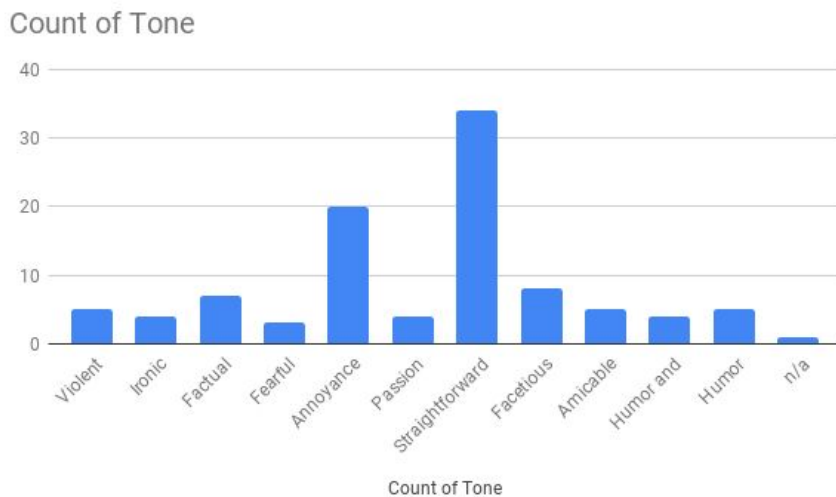
Through a collection of tweets containing the hashtag *whitelivesmatter* I collected a random sample of 100 tweets out of a body of over 7,000 all posted on tuesday, June 23rd 2020. I then sorted the tweets into three basic categories based on the political stance of the author, their tone, and any logic they apply in their post.



Of the 100 tweets in my sample 76

were definitely in support of the *whitelivesmatter* (wlm) movement, with 23 tweets using the hashtag in a trolling capacity, and one user's tweet could not be determined as it was in an unidentifiable language. The majority of the sampled tweets were short, straightforward posts only containing the hashtag, usually directed at another user. The second largest group were the "annoyed" who also made up the majority of the "ignorance" and "double standard" groups in my logical reasoning category.





These users are all similar

in their flawed reasoning when trying to compare the Black Lives Matter movement to their own White Lives Matter. For example, user *@william1980* posted “How the fuck is Black Lives Matter acceptable yet White Lives Matter and All Lives Matter deemed as racist. What a joke. If a plane flew over with Black Lives Matter last night it would be treated as inspirational and a milestone. Media are a joke. #WhiteLivesMatter #Burnley”. This tweet was in direct response to an incident on June 23rd when a plane with a banner reading *WHITE LIVES MATTER BURNLEY* flew over a football stadium by an unknown pilot , stirring controversy across the UK. The Burnley Football Club condemned the act, fueling the firestorm of twitter users rushing the pilot’s defense. *william1980’s* post illustrates a blindness by him and millions of others around the world who fail to recognize their own white privilege, and the purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement. “Indeed, several social psychological theories propose that high-status groups are motivated to maintain their high-status advantage by oppressing low-status groups (Verkuyten& Yogeewaran, 2017), and critical race theorists propose that White Americans are motivated to deny the existence of racism and White advantage, and the need for

hierarchy-reducing policies(e.g.,affirmative action and welfare), because doing so legitimizes their own social status(DiAngelo, 2012; Helms, 1992)” (Rizzo & Roberts. 15-16). By calling attention to the inequalities of western society, some white people, rather than recognizing their privilege, further close off their already narrow worldview. To these people, it is more pleasant to believe society is equal, and racism is not institutionalized because the alternative would mean benefitting from a system that oppresses minority groups. By stating white lives or all lives matter, these people resist any notion their worldview is incorrect. Of course this defensive reaction does not only mean dismissing people who speak contrary to their beliefs, but state that any threat to the system as it exists is a threat to their race.

Though less common, the hashtag *whitegenocide* was persistent enough in my sample to be of note. The hashtag was only used by three different users out of the one hundred sampled, making up a small minority, but a frightening one regardless. User *@MauiRheeder* posted “@VGeorge2k18 @schiopu_necula and @hassanlr4eva That is so true. #WhiteLivesMatter so stop #WhiteGenocide and #FarmAttack in #SouthAfrica”. *MauiRheeder* is replying to several users' posts on recent reports of South African Farmers being attacked. Researching these attacks, it is extraordinarily difficult to find any consistent details, but the basic thread goes that white farm owners are being attacked and killed by black assailants. Reactionaries like *@MauiRheeder* and his peers jump to the conclusion that these attacks are racialized, but South African policing expert, Johan Burger, says “It is true that, if you look at just farmers, it is still mostly white farmers who get attacked. But that does not mean that black farmers and black workers are not killed.” If these attacks were truly racialized the victims would be a vast majority, if not all white, but the facts say otherwise. That does not prevent

some conservative minded people from drawing the conclusion that with the rise of black movements and random violent acts that the very existence of the white race is in jeopardy.

On August 3rd, 2019, Patrick Crusius drove approximately nine hours from his home in Allen Texas to the largely Hispanic populated El Paso where he shot and killed twenty-three unarmed civilians. Crusius' attack was racially motivated, choosing to drive such a long distance solely to attack a majority hispanic area. Before the shooting investigations found that Crusius was a regular user of 8chan, a radically "free speech" forum page where he received help and planning his attack from other radical white supremacists. "8chan has been under increased public scrutiny after a string of violent firearm incidents in late 2018 and 2019 were attributed to the website's lack of moderation and hegemonic far-right politics: the perpetrators of racially- or religiously-motivated massacres in Christchurch, New Zealand, San Diego, and El Paso have all been linked to 8chan, particularly its /pol/ board, [...] especially since the latter was motivated by xenophobia and theories of demographic replacement also present on 8chan. (Hagan). It can be argued that the connectivity of social media has allowed for increased radicalization on both sides of the political spectrum, and in the case of the right, radical ideas spread on forums, are causing more radical actions to occur in the real world.

Twitter and other social media platforms are allowing people the unprecedented opportunity to share and discuss with millions of people all around the world. This sounds as though people would come together with a deeper more empathetic understanding of each other, but due to some tragic flaw in human psychology we choose to remain in our ingroups, and other outsiders; making increasingly bubbled internet experiences that further radicalize thoughts and opinions. In the case of conservative twitter users, the use of hashtags like *alllivesmatter*, algorithmically lead to *whitelivesmatter*, then possibly to *whitegenocide*. Our

presence on the internet shapes our perspective and our actions. It is vital as users of the internet we do all we can to be skeptical of information, open-minded, and empathetic.

Citations

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“Digital social platforms create new spaces and methods for discourse where the stereotypes and racial biases of the physical world are often reified, an issue that may potentially be exacerbated as the divide between our digital and corporeal identities grows thinner.”

“ These groups exploit the fear of erasure felt by white men to slowly inoculate them to increasingly extremist ideology (Condis, 2019). Discord has proven itself to be a useful tool for white supremacists to recruit members from servers centered around gaming communities.

Alt-right groups then go on to utilize Discord as a space for the production and reproduction of culture, as well as a space to organize (Kamenetz, 2018). “ (4)

“ Mirroring society at large, the racism of the internet may also manifest in more covert ways related to colorblind ideology and the denial or minimizing of racial issues and racism through humor (Brock, 2009; Daniels, 2013).” (8)

Rizzo, M., & Roberts, S. (2020). The Psychology of American Racism. Retrieved June 23, 2020, from <https://osf.io/w2h73>

“intergroup tensions are particularly likely to flare when groups experience threats to their self-image (i.e., esteem threats), uniqueness (i.e., distinctiveness threats), values and beliefs (i.e., symbolic threats)” (10)

“Indeed, several social psychological theories propose that high-status groups are motivated to maintain their high-status advantage by oppressing low-status groups (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2017), and critical race theorists propose that White Americans are motivated to deny the existence of racism and White advantage, and the need for hierarchy-reducing policies (e.g., affirmative action and welfare), because doing so legitimizes their own social status (DiAngelo, 2012; Helms, 1992)” (Rizzo & Roberts. 15-16)

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