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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE: AN EXAMINATION OF
THE PROTESTOR EXPERIENCE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Naya Sanai Russell-Coprish

College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Criminology and Criminal Justice

August 2022

This Thesis by: Naya Russell-Coprigh

Entitled: *No Justice, No Peace: An Examination of the Protestor Experience*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Humanities and Social Sciences in Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice, Program of Criminology & Criminal Justice MA.

Accepted by the Thesis Committee:

Victoria Terranova, Ph.D., Chair

Kyle Ward, Ph.D., Committee Member

Accepted by the Graduate School

Jerri-Anne Lyons, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Associate Vice President for Research

ABSTRACT

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More than 95% of the protests that took place in the summer of 2020 were deemed peaceful. However, many of these protests ended with violent encounters with police officers (Major Cities Chiefs Association, 2020). The purpose of this research was to explore the experience of protestors in America. This study also sought to identify, if at all, the disparities present when deciding to use excessive force against protestors. The sample for this study included students from the University of Northern Colorado, who were 18 years of age or older, and have attended a protest in their lifetime. The final sample size for this study included a total of 53 qualifying students from the University of Northern Colorado. This quantitative study sought to contribute to the existing literature by expanding prior knowledge of protestors' experience in America. This was done through the distribution of a 27-question survey which included both open and closed ended questions that sought to measure trauma experienced, altered perceptions, and possible disparities. To analyze and fully understand these experiences both a thematic content analysis and a t-test was conducted.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The First Amendment provides individuals with the right to freedom of speech, freedom of the press; and the right to peaceably assemble. This amendment has provided people with the ability to march, parade, picket, circulate petitions, and ask for signatures, along with other forms of peaceful protests (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2020). Although they are not a new occurrence, protests have been at the forefront of the media for the last 60 years. The inherent tension between the police and civilians have provided protesters with numerous reasons to hold demonstrations. Whether individuals are protesting police brutality, human rights, kids in cages, or gun laws protests have become a very important part of history. These protests and other forms of expression often lead to changes in policy. Since May of 2020, there have been over 10,600 demonstration events across the country (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data [ACLED], 2020). This calculation ended in mid-August, however, there have been numerous protests that have been organized since then. For example, the continuous protests in Portland, Oregon in support of Breonna Taylor.

In just one week more than 3,500 demonstrations took place in the U.S. either in support of or against the Black Lives Matter movement (ACLED, 2020). The movement, which began has a hashtag after the death of Trayvon Martin has grown nationally into one of the biggest Black advocacy movements in the world. According to the ACLED (2020), despite popular belief and depiction in the media, 95% of these protests involved peaceful protestors. In spite of the lack of violence promoted during these protests, 19 people were killed many of them at the

hands of the police or vigilantes (McEvoy, 2020). The large majority of the protests in 2020 connected to either the Black Lives Matter movement or COVID-19 sanitary protocols such as masks (ACLED,2020). As the 2020 election approached, there were many demonstrations in support of both candidates. In the wake of these protests, there were several reports of police use of force against protestors (Thomas et al., 2020). There were more than 950 incidents of police use of force against protestors which included the use of less-lethal rounds, pepper spray, and teargas. As these demonstrations lasted for over 100 days protestors found themselves plagued by this brutalization.

The purpose of the current study was to examine the experience of protestors in America. Furthermore, this study sought to identify any disparities concerning trauma experienced by protestors as a result of police interaction. It is hypothesized that groups who are seen as more threatening received disparate and harsher treatment by police officers while attending protests (Hinton et al., 2018). While previous studies have examined the experience of protestors, this exploratory study added new insights by examining these experiences specifically looking at college aged individuals. The current study applied the ideas of Hubert Blalock's Racial Threat Hypothesis to the possible disparities in the way police respond to these demonstrations. Although current literature surrounding protestors is sparse there were four identified domains that are discussed in the literature review. The current study sought to answer the following research questions:

- Q1 Are the perceived attitudes of protestors towards police officers altered based on their experience at the protest?
- Q2 Are there perceived tensions between protestors and police officers based on the experience of protestors?
- Q3 Does the type of trauma experienced at a protest differ based on the type of protest attended?

To answer these questions the current study first utilized a thematic content analysis. This content analysis was used to answer the first and second research questions relating to perceived attitude alterations of protestors towards police officers and perceived tensions between the two. Secondly, the current study utilized the parametric statistical analysis t-test to answer the third research question relating to types of possible trauma experienced as a result of police interaction.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

When conducting the literary research there was very limited material regarding protest and the protestor experience. Similarly, there was little to no literature examining protests under the scope of the racial threat hypothesis. The current section discusses the current literature relating to the experience of protestors and the use of force by police officers directly relating this information to the tenets of Blalock's Racial Threat Hypothesis. Although the right to peacefully assemble is granted to all citizens of the United States some protestors often face criticism. In some cases, these protests are taken over by agitators and radicals exploiting these demonstrations to pursue their own separate violent agenda (Hutchinson, 2020). Despite a clear distinction between protestors and rioters, many protestors were subjected to violence and are even arrested.

Blalock (1979) discusses the notion that when threats arise conflict groups may be encouraged to do the "dirty work" of dominant parties attempting to maintain control. Perhaps this can explain the takeovers by agitators and radicals who were exploiting these violent agendas. There were 60 instances where police officers used unlawful assembly to arrest protestors despite the protestors having permission to assemble (Thomas et al., 2020). Despite the many stories heard in the news the literature regarding violence against protestors is surprisingly limited. However, the current literature that does exist mostly serves as a critique of these social movements. The current section of this paper discusses the provocation of protestors, the militarization of protest responses, and disparities of punishment and police presence. As

mentioned before, this study examined the disparities found in the traumas experienced as a result of police interaction at these protests. To better understand the disparities that may arise these occurrences were assessed under the lens of the racial threat hypothesis.

Theoretical Framework

This study attempts to explain disparities of police response to protest using Hubert Blalock's 1967 Racial Threat Hypothesis. Blalock's hypothesis states that as the relative size of racial and ethnic minority group increases, members of the majority group begin to perceive them as a growing threat (Wang & Todak, 2016). According to the hypothesis, economic and political threat are two major ways in which a minority group can pose a threat. Economic threat proposes that increasing number of minority groups compete for jobs, housing, and other economic resources (Wang & Todak, 2016). This notion assumes that prejudice is created to preserve the dominance of the economically elite. This deliberate creation and enforcement of prejudice can foster discrimination in impersonal economic forces, levels of living, or urbanization and industrialization (Blalock, 1967). Our system thrives on incompatibility because it aids in further imposing these prejudice ideologies. Group classification is one political and economic technique used to benefit the majority group in the struggle for scarce resources. (Hjerm & Nagayoshi, 2011). Notions such as this help to explain why we are categorized into groups depending on our social economic status. These categories further drive us apart as they are seen as another differentiating characteristic.

As an extension of the political threat Blalock introduces a phenomenon called the flexibility principle. This refers to the idea that the goals permitting the least flexibility may be expected to have the greatest influence in determining the direction of behavior, although it does not determine the intensity or persistence of such behavior. Blalock relates the flexibility

principle directly to minority discrimination, but he first introduced two important assumptions. The first assumption is that minorities are relevant to some of the important goals of society and the second is that these goals have to be appropriate and applicable to the dominant group. This suggests that the majority sets the tone for obtainable goals while minorities hold some but not much of this relevance. That is why when the number of minorities are growing the majority group sees them as a threat because it is possible that they could set that tone. In a study conducted by Hjerm and Nagayoshi (2011) they examined how economic and cultural threats explain xenophobia specifically in regard to immigration. Researchers found that immigrants are perceived to pose both a cultural and economic threat to what researchers call the host society. Findings suggest that perhaps the size of the minority groups is not the problem but only when these groups begin to threaten the culture of the host society.

Similarly, researchers found that as the Black population increases there is a perceived political and economic threat to the dominant population (D'Alessio et al., 2005). When minority groups pose such a threat the majority groups implement a host of restrictions that directly target the economic advancements of these minority groups. This sort of tactic is still used today to stunt the economic growth of minority populations so that the majority can stay in power. One specific practice is the exclusion of minority families from financial systems such as banks. This exclusion from these systems have resulted in the financial illiteracy of many minority families. This has led to instances such as the typical Black family only acquiring 1/10th the wealth of the typical white family (Schermerhorn, 2019). These tactics are a part of discrimination that stems from the early 1800's. Another example that is provided by Schermerhorn (2019) is that in 1863 Black Americans owned just one-half of 1 percent of the national wealth and today that number is just over 1.5 percent. Of course, this is progress however, there continues to be new bundles of

discrimination targeting these growing and prospering minority populations. These bundles of discrimination seem to be the result of this fear that the majority group has about the economic progress of growing minority populations.

The second tenet of racial threat hypothesis is political threat. Political threat occurs when minority populations enhance their political power, causing the majority to feel like the political power they hold has been jeopardized. With political power comes access to a number of things which includes resources such as money, property, prestige, authority, voting rights, ability to bear arms, and formal education (Blalock, 1967). Blalock describes this tenet as one specifically used by the majority group as their fears increase. The majority group uses gatekeepers such as job markets, housing markets, and educational systems to maintain this power and keep their dominance. Laws and legislation also serve as gatekeepers used to keep dominant groups in power. According to Blalock (1967) “if Whites are to maintain a constant power advantage over Negroes, then the degree of their mobilization relative to that of Negroes must not only increase with per cent Negro, but it must also rise at an increasing rate” (p. 153).

This increasing rate of domination can be seen in a number of ways. For example, a study examining racial and ethnic composition as it relates to concealed carry voting outcomes found that areas with an increasing Black population had higher rates of support for concealed carry laws (Mullins & Kavish, 2017). This can also be found in incarceration rates and policing practices. For example, when examining whether federal sentencing decisions are influenced by race/ethnicity Feldmeyer and Ulmer (2011) found that the sentences for Black defendants were about 6 times longer than their White counterparts. Similarly, when comparing Black and Hispanic sentencing lengths, Black individuals were still sentence more harshly than their Hispanic counterparts. These types of disparities can also be found when dealing with

community level government issues. For example, in areas with higher minority populations, White support for ending affirmative action was high even after controlling for partisanship, socioeconomic conditions, and urban nature of the community (Tolbert & Grummel, 2003).

This not only corresponds with previous research relating to the minority threat hypothesis, but it is a clear example of how these perceived threats generate real and sometimes detrimental changes. A key example of these changes is that affirmative action has become practically nonexistent and completely abolished in 9 states. The forementioned article provides us with a look at how support for affirmative action changed over time, eventually leading to it becoming less popular. These changes are often one sided and are weaponized by the majority group. This leads to members of the dominants group using different political means to achieve economic ends amongst other one-sided gains (Blalock, 1967).

Types of Discrimination

These types of actions influenced by this fear generates three general types of discrimination which Blalock describes as the following: restriction of minority's political rights, symbolic forms of segregation, and a threat-orientation ideological system. Political discrimination is categorized as both the restriction of minorities to vote and the voting behaviors of dominant groups themselves (Blalock, 1967). For example, the restriction of Black individuals being able to vote until 1965 even though the fifteenth amendment was passed in 1870. Or like in the most recent presidential election when many state governments were accused of practicing voting discrimination.

Efforts to restrict the registration of minorities is aimed at limiting mobilization which becomes more prevalent when the Black population reached 20 percent or more (Blalock, 1967). This was because at that capacity Black individuals could hold balance of power in many

elections. Of course, all low voters turn out for minority populations is not the result of direct political discrimination. However, these are clear instances of the fear and inexperience birthed by deep rooted discrimination from long ago. The next form of discrimination described by Blalock is Symbolic Segregation which is the means of separating races both conceptually and physically in order to maintain white dominance (Blalock, 1967). This form of discrimination refers to “Jim Crow” laws and practices which were enacted in the early 1870s. Examples of these laws and practices include separate drinking fountains, restaurants, waiting rooms, and restrooms. The important thing about symbolic segregation is that it has few or no economic gains or any other types of functions (Blalock, 1967). Instead, this form of discrimination draws a clear line between the White and the Black population making a clear indication of who holds the power.

According to Blalock (1967) “The use of separate drinking fountains, for example, indicates in effect that whatever social distinctions may exist between the wealthy and poor and the poor white, these are insignificant as compared with the rigid line between white and Negro” (p. 164). With distinctions as such there is always a clear picture of who is seen as dominant. This domination holds despite other distinguishing factors such as social economic status or sex. The final form of discrimination that is presented by Blalock is threat-oriented ideologies. This refers to beliefs-systems and ideologies that function to maintain the needs and convenience of individuals but also groups.

Often these belief-systems and ideologies that are driven by fear are harmful and detrimental. This tends to further divide and drive this distinction in a negative manner. For example, while examining red states opposition of the Black Lives Matter Movement Updegrave et al., (2018) found that republicans were 160% more likely to oppose the BLM movement than

non-republicans. Despite the groups stated intentions, there continues to be a perceived threat associated with the movement. Findings such as this also have a clear relation to the previously mentioned political threat. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation released a warning of the dangers “black identity extremists” pose to police, which was in reference to BLM organizations (Updegrave et al., 2018). When there is a mix between political threat and the actions used to clearly set a divide, there seems to be creation of these harmful ideologies. Each form of discrimination and the tactics associated with them have time and time again been used to further promote this deep-rooted goal of division prompted in most part by fear.

Provocation of Protestors

With the recent uptick in protests, many scholars have highlighted increased reports of aggressive policing strategies in response to these demonstrations (Tyler et al., 2018). In the eyes of these police officers, this aggressive policing strategy is often justified, and this aggressive behavior is a necessary part of protecting themselves and the public. Blalock (1967) suggests that there is a power threat associated with these large groups that promoted different forms of discrimination and violence. For example, in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement, there was significant conflict between police and protesters (Maguire et al., 2018). This conflict which resulted from the use of force by police officers can be troublesome and have consequences resulting in further disruption. Research suggests that when subjected to violence by police officers' protestors are more likely to rebel and endorse acts of violence themselves (Tyler et al., 2018). This violent behavior occurs following aggressive police behavior that is considered by the protestors as unjust.

Contrary to this, research shows that perceptions of procedurally just police are more likely to feel an internalized obligation to obey the law and legal authorities (Snipes et al., 2019).

Both studies suggest that attitudes and perceptions of the protestors are primarily based on the actions of the police officers. These findings suggest that protestors who had a positive attitude towards police before participating in the protests were less likely to be supportive of the use of violence against police officers. Similarly, the perception of unjust use of force by police officers has a strong, positive impact on the support for the use of violence against the police (Maguire et al., 2018). This was a prevalent notion found within the previous literature regarding protestors' experience. Tyler et al. (2018) too found that perceived unjust use of force by the police had a positive effect on support for the use of violence against police. This finding suggests that as protestors perceived that police officers acted in an unjust manner, they were more likely to have reported support for the use of violence against these officers. However, the personal experience of unjust force against themselves or their peers did not have significant effects on support for civil disobedience (Snipes et al., 2019). These findings suggest that even when witnessing or experiencing force at the hands of the police the majority of protestors chose not to act violently.

In situations where police officers continued to engage in violence towards protestors despite peaceful protesting there is a perceived threat of power (Blalock, 1967). Contrary to the findings of Snipes et al., (2019), in the pursuit of change, violence against police officers was reasonable if protestors perceived that unjust force was displayed by these officers (Maguire et al., 2018). Findings suggest that violence towards the police was condoned by protestors as it in some way related to their cause. On the other hand, Tyler et al. (2018) found that those who reported positive attitudes towards the police prior to engaging in demonstrations were less likely to support the use of violence against the police. Having a stake in conformity was found to determine the protestors experience and the amount of violence they chose to engage in. Snipes et al. (2019) found that a stake in conformity did not have a significant effect on support for civil

disobedience in any of the studied cities. Contrary to this, those who had greater stake in conformity were less likely to support the use of violence against police officers (Maguire et al., 2018). This finding suggests that having a stake in conformity acted as a motivating factor to remain peaceful at these demonstrations.

In addition, researchers found that protestors who were heavily involved in the protests were more likely to engage in violence against the police (Snipes et al., 2019; Tyler et al., 2018). The researchers suggest that witnessing these unjust uses of force prompted protestors to gain this social identity making them more likely to engage in violence themselves. Furthermore, in two of the conducted studies races did not have a significant effect on the support or engagement in violence among protestors (Snipes et al., 2019; Tyler et al., 2018). This was not the case for the third study conducted regarding protestor violence. Maguire et al., (2018) found that in DC, Black respondents reported significantly greater support for the use of violence against the police. These findings suggest that the intentions, attitudes, and behaviors of protestors are heavily influenced by the action, tactics, and strategies used by police officers while responding to these protests.

Blalock (1967) proposes a power-difference model referring to the notion that if Whites are to maintain power, their techniques of mobilization need to increase as the Black population increases. When applying this notion to the relationship of protestors and police officers there are a number of similarities. For example, at these protests if police officers are to maintain constant power over the protestors, their degree of mobilization must increase as protestors do. This increase must remain at a constant rate of increase. This allows police officers to not only maintain power over the protest but also neutralize any suspected threat that may cause harm to them or the community.

The Militarization of Protest Responses

Although the large majority of Black Lives Matter protests are non-violent 1 in 10 of these demonstrations were met with some kind of force by the police (ACLEDE,2020). This force often includes armored vehicles, tear gas canisters, rubber bullets, and military grade uniforms (Nolan, 2020). The militarization of the police has been a key feature of police forces since the September 11th attack. Despite supposed efforts to promote de-escalation and problem solving, police culture continues to display a us vs. them mentality.

In a study conducted by Perry et al., (2017) over 80 percent of respondents reported witnessing a paramilitary response by police officers. The militarization of police responses at protests is not a problem isolated in the United States. In countries like Turkey, protocols were implemented to ensure collaboration between the police and military authorities while responding to large demonstrations. Perceived paramilitarism affected the trust of the protestors because it elicited a sense of alienation and division between the protestors and the police officers (Perry et al.,2017). This distrust not only affected the behavior of the protestors while participating in the protest, but it also affected their experience after the demonstration.

Researchers found that 49% of protesters displayed severe symptoms of depression, and post-traumatic stress symptoms after being subjected to excessive force at a protest. Many state governments summoned the National Guard troops, Secret Service agents, and US Park Police among other federal agencies under the direction of the President (ACLEDE, 2020). Perry et al. (2017) suggests that when governments deploy these military-grade officers the notion of protecting and serving goes out of the window. Participants in the study commonly felt that when military officers were deployed it was no longer to keep them safe but rather treat them as an

enemy. The growing concern of police militarization has proved to be problematic and has generated much distrust and discomfort.

Racial Threat Hypothesis and Disparities of Punishment and Police Presence

Along with the disparities found with police responses to different protest under the scope of racial threat hypothesis there are also a number of disparities related to punishment and police presence as a whole. In 2020, by the end of the summer, more than 10,000 people nationwide had been arrested while reportedly peacefully protesting the unjust killing of George Floyd (Sainato, 2020). Seven months later when several thousand people stormed the nation's Capital a mere 69 people had been arrested in the immediate aftermath of the insurrection (Shamsian & Click, 2021). The reports from the two events show clear disparities regarding both punishment and police response.

Not only can these disparities be found in arrest but in punishments like probation, as well. The focus is on probation because that was the common punishment received by a number of the protestors. For example, St. John (2019) examined the relationship between race and community corrections during the 1980s. The researcher found that Black probationers are 270% more likely than their White counterparts to be arrested for a felony while on probation. The researcher also found that when communities are made up of 44-54% of minorities there is a 142% chance of a probationer to be rearrested for a felony compared to communities with 10% or less minorities (St. John, 2019). Findings suggest that communities with higher percentages of minorities are more likely to rearrest probationers for felony crimes.

Similarly, Curran (1983) found that in Dade County, Florida, Black defendants were more likely than their White counterparts to have their cases prosecuted. This study is more than 30 years old but still very relevant to the findings being produced today. When looking at other

characteristics of these cases, Myers, and Hagan (1979) found that in cases with White victims the defendant was more likely to be prosecuted than those cases with Black victims. These findings suggest that there are disparities at every end of the justice system. The long-lived discrimination and bias of the American system has created what Blalock hypothesized as a caste-like system where mobility throughout this caste would be almost impossible (Blalock, 1967). This hypothesis provides an explanation for why there are so many forms of discrimination and why disparities are present at every stage of the justice system.

Protestor Experience

Although there is not much literature of the experience of protestors, we do know protestors believed that officers did not operate under the right motives when responding to the demonstrations (Johnathan-Zamir et al., 2020). In this study, protestors believed that police officers had no intentions of allowing freedom of speech or keeping protestors safe. They also reported protestors feeling like police officers were making deliberate efforts to de-legitimize their demonstration causing harm and trouble. Despite protest being a relevant and frequent occurrence, the notion of the protestor experience is severely understudied. The current study sought to expand on the literature by focusing specifically on the experience's protestors face. Not only did the current study examine this experience but it did so with a population that is familiar with protest.

Although limited, the current literature surrounding the experience of protestors has proven to be very informative. Upon conducting the literary search four domains were identified which included the provocation of protestors, militarization of responses, and protestor experience. Literature shows that oftentimes protestors were provoked by unjust police actions and use of force. The literature also showed that police responses to protests have become more

militarized like much of American law enforcement. The racial threat hypothesis was also discussed in relation to which protestors were being arrested and the punishments they were receiving. Finally, when it comes to directly examining the protestors experience there is not much literature. However, the existing literature did report protestors feeling like deliberate efforts by officers were being made to delegitimize their demonstrations. There is a gap in the literature surrounding the experiences protestors have with police officers while attending these demonstrations. The majority of the existing literature focuses on the aftermath of these demonstrations and reformative needs. The current study filled this gap by not only specifically examining the experiences of protestors but doing so in a manner that measure the severity of trauma experienced, altered perceptions of police officers, and by identifying any possible disparities that may arise.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the current study was to unveil any disparities related to the way police officers respond to different protests by specifically examining the experience of the protestors. To meet this purpose the following research questions are being asked.

- Q1 Are the perceived attitudes of protestors towards police officers altered based on their experience at the protest?
- Q2 Are there perceived tensions between protesters and police officers based on the experience of protestors?
- Q 3 Does the type of trauma experienced at a protest differ based on the type of protest attended?

To answer these questions a survey was distributed to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Northern Colorado. Qualifying factors for this study included being currently enrolled at the University of Northern Colorado, being 18 years of age or older, and having attended a protest. To answer the first and second research questions, a content analysis was conducted. As for the third research question a t-test which identifies the difference between groups means was conducted to identify the difference in means between the two types of protest.

Research Design

The objective of this exploratory study was to examine the experiences of a wider variety of protestors in America. This study sought to capture perceptions about disparities related to how police respond to protests. A better understanding of these disparities and the experience of protestors was gained through the use of an online survey. This online survey included general

demographic questions (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) along with questions that sought to capture the experience of protestors and their perceptions of police officers. The survey instrument consisted of a total of 27 questions made up of a mixture of both closed and open-ended questions. In total the survey only took respondents an average of 10 minutes or less to be completed.

Population and Sample

The findings from this study were used to generate inferences about both the undergraduate and graduate students attending the University of Northern Colorado. In order to generate an unbiased sample, the reasoning behind the protest did not have to meet any specific criteria. The sample for this study included students currently attending the University of Northern Colorado. In the past decade, there has been a resurgence of student led activism allowing college students to be more active than ever before (Carlton, 2020). College students have been successful in fighting against racial injustices, tuition increases, and unfair campus policy. For example, last year students at Howard University were protesting against unmet demands relating to campus living conditions (Wright, 2021). Their demonstrations went viral and prompted much change at the university.

College campuses have a long history of serving as hot beds for political and social disputes. College students in particular are at the forefront of some of the most important political and social movements both in the United States and around the world (Carlton, 2020). This includes civil rights, anti-apartheid, racial representation, environmentalism, and LGBTQ rights. Because of this involvement in activism, students bring a unique perception regarding the experience of protestors that the researcher examined.

Qualifying factors of this study included being an enrolled student at the University of Northern Colorado, having attended a protest in the participants in one's lifetime, and those who are 18 years of age or older. However, the survey only inquired about the most recent protest attended. This ensured that participants could provide the researcher with the most valid and reliable recollection of their experience. The average age of college students (21.8 years old) and the average age of protestors (18 – 29 years old) are similar. The parallel between these two ages is reflective of individuals who have attended a protest more likely than not (Barroso & Minkin, 2020; Hanson, 2021). This guaranteed that students at the University of Northern Colorado who participated in the current research fell within this parallel and were able to provide thoughtful insight into their protestor experience.

Data Collection

To gain a sample of college students at the University of Northern Colorado the researcher utilized purposive sampling. For a total of six weeks the researcher attended classes being held at UNCO proposing the current study to each student in the class. This proposal included information regarding the topic at hand, criteria for participation, and the duration of the survey. Previous research shows that including such significant information is an effective means of increasing response rates (Dillman et al., 2009).

Those who fit the criterion and agreed to participate were given a QR code to scan so that they could complete the survey using their cell phones. The survey tool Qualtrics was used to generate and implement the online survey methodology. This survey tool enabled respondents to fill-out the survey using the QR code provided to the researcher. The survey included a total of 27 questions that analyzed the experiences of protestors by measuring trauma experienced, altered perceptions, and possible disparities in police responses (see Appendix A). The final

sample size for the current study included a total of 53 respondents. To begin, the survey included a question that allowed respondents to consent to the survey which included information regarding the study, the contact information for the researcher, and potential harms and risk that may arise. Answering “I agree to participate in the following survey” confirmed that the participant has provided the researcher with full consent (Applebaum, 2001).

Following the consent portion of the survey, participants were presented with questions measuring the severity of violence. Respondents were asked on a scale of 0-5 with 0 being no violence experienced and 5 being extreme violence experienced to indicate the level of violence experienced at the protest by police officers. Respondents were then asked on a scale of 0-5 with 0 being no violence experienced and 5 being extreme violence experienced to indicate the level of violence experienced at the protest by other protestors. Both questions included a follow-up question that asked respondents to explain these experiences if they indicated any level of violence.

The second set of questions presented in the survey were items that measured the mental, physical, and emotional trauma experienced by protestors. Respondents were asked on a scale of 0-5 with 0 not being traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of physical, mental, and emotional trauma experienced at the hand of police officers while attending the protest. These three questions were followed by three follow-up questions that asked respondents to explain any reports of trauma.

The third set of questions presented included items that measured any alteration related to perceptions of protestors. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement, my attitudes towards police officers were altered after attending the protest. Alteration was measured using a Likert scale which included the items of strongly agree, agree,

disagree, and strongly disagree. The fourth set of questions presented included items that measured perceived tensions between protestors and police officers. First, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement at the protest there was noticeable tension between protestors and police officers. Perceived tensions were measured using a Likert scale which included the items of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The final set of questions included measured the demographic characteristics of the respondents. All who participated in and completed the survey were entered into a random drawing for a \$50 dollar gift card to an establishment of their choice. An incentive was offered to aid in the efforts of gathering a sufficient response rate. Considering that research shows using monetary incentives produce increases the likelihood of not only responding to but also completing the survey (James & Bolstein, 1992). Using a separate sign-up sheet emails of these respondents were gathered for the purposes of notifying the winner of the raffle. These emails were kept separate and can in no way be linked to the responses ensuring confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The survey covered three domains that relate directly to each research question. These domains included law enforcement and protestor experience, captured disparities based on protestor experience, and tensions between protestors and the police. Each domain is relevant to one of the three research questions this study sought to answer. A thematic content analysis was conducted to answer the first and second research questions. This type of content analysis refers to the portrayal of the thematic content collected from research participants identifying themes that are reflective of the research topic (Anderson, 2014). To aid in this analysis, NVivo, a qualitative analysis tool, was used to conduct a word coding and thematic analysis which was

used to identify patterns and common themes that may arise (Zamawe, 2015). Common words, phrases, and encounters were identified to gain a better understanding of the experiences of these protestors. These words, themes, and concepts allowed the researcher to better understand perceived attitudes and identify tensions based on the experience of the respondents. This was the most appropriate method for these research questions because the researcher relied on the experience of the respondents. Conducting an analysis of the responses allowed for a direct examination of the information aiding the researcher to better understand the perceived tensions between protestors and police officers.

After the survey data were collected, the data were cleaned and analyzed using the research tool SPSS which is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. A series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to answer the third and final research question. This analysis tool was used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of two groups. The current study compared the mean scores relating to perceptions of types of traumas experienced as a result of police interaction based the type of protest attended. The researcher generated a list of protests that were prevalent throughout recent years and asked the respondents to choose which option best fits their experience.

These options included but were not limited to (1) Anti-Lockdown Protests, (2) Black Lives Matter Protests, (3) Alt-Right Protests, (4) Anti-Ice Protests. Respondents were given an option of other if they did not see their protest topic listed in the survey. A breakdown of the protest demographics can be found in table 4.1. Because the estimates of the t-test determine differences between the mean scores of two groups, the researcher categorized each option as either political or activist.

Table 4.1*Descriptive Statistics for Types of Protest Attended*

Protest	Frequencies	%
Black Lives Matter	33	62.26
Black Trans Lives Matter	1	1.89
The Women's March	4	7.55
Alt-right Protest	1	1.89
Stop the Steal	1	1.89
LGBTQ Rights Protest	2	3.77
Pro-Choice	2	3.77
Gun Laws	4	7.55
Anti-Abortion	1	1.89

To determine whether there was a significant difference in the mean scores between the two groups (political and activism) a t-test was the most appropriate model. Using the t-statistic, the t-distribution values, and the degrees of freedom, aided in determining the statistical significance. The t-test provided an indication that the mean scores for the types of traumas was different based on the reasoning of the protest (Agresti, 2018). Furthermore, the null hypothesis was that the difference in the group means is zero.

If the null hypothesis was not rejected then, on average, it does not matter the reasoning behind the protest in relation to the type and level of trauma experienced (Mouritsen et al., 2016). If the null hypothesis was rejected there may be an indicated difference in the type or level of trauma experienced based on the reasoning of the protest. Because of this, there was possibility of a post hoc test being run to further examine the significance identifying exactly which group is significantly different from the others (Frost, 2021).

The independent variable for this test were the 2 categories listed above that the researcher used to classify the different types of protest reported. The dependent variables were the three types of possible traumas experienced by protestors as a result of interactions with

police officers. These included physical (serious injury to the body, e.g., contusions or bruises), mental (damage to the mind that resulted in exacerbated stress or anxiety), and emotional (damage as a result in feelings of deep unsafety and helplessness).

Definition of Terms

The definitions that were used by the researcher to categorize these topics include:

Political – Demonstration pertaining to the objection, disapproval, or dissent of a political or government led idea or action. For example, protesting against mandated mask wearing.

Activism – Demonstration pertaining to the objection, disapproval, or dissent of a social (alteration of social order), economic (alteration to economic systems), or environmental (alteration to the natural environment) idea or action with the intention of altering social order or a perceived greater good. For example, protesting against animal testing and cruelty.

Attitudes of Protestors

To gather content and answer research questions number one respondents were asked two questions. The initial question measured alterations in the participants attitudes and perceptions of police officers after attending the protest. This survey item asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: my attitudes towards police officers were altered after attending the protest. This was measured using a Likert scale and included the response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. If respondents indicated any level of alteration in their attitudes/perceptions of police officers, they were asked to explain in a follow up question. This follow up, open-ended question asked respondents the following: if you indicated that your attitudes toward police officers were altered after attending the protest, please explain. Respondents were provided with a textbox allowing

them to explain this alteration. If respondents did not indicate any level of alteration, they were asked to skip the follow up question and continue the survey.

Perceived Tensions Between Protestors and Police Officers

To gather content and answer the second research question regarding the presence of perceived tension between police officers and protestors, a total of two questions were asked. To measure these perceived tensions, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreeance with the following statement: at the protest there were noticeable tensions between protestors and police officers. This was measured using a Likert scale and included the response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Following this question respondents were given a follow up question asking them to indicate the level of agreement with the following statement: this tension led to violence (unlawful physical force or an attempt to intimidate) by the police officers at the protest? Similar to the first question, this was measured using a Likert scale and included the response options of strongly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Perceived Disparities Based on Protestor Experience

To answer the final research question relating to possible disparities 8 questions were asked. This concept was measured by asking respondents to indicated on a scale of 0-5 the level of mental, physical, and emotional trauma they experienced as a result of police interaction. To measure physical trauma respondents were asked, on a scale of 0-5 with 0 not being traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of physical trauma experienced (serious injury to the body e.g., contusions or bruises) at the hand of police officers while attending the protest. Response options for this question were coded on a continuous scale which included 0,1,2,3,4,5. If respondents indicated any level of physical trauma (meaning anything but 0 was

chosen) they were asked to provide an explanation of this account in a follow-up question. The follow up open-ended question was as follows: if you indicated any level of physical trauma experienced, please use the space below to explain this incidence of physical trauma.

To measure mental trauma respondents were asked, on a scale of 0-5 with 0 not being traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of mental trauma experienced (damage to the mind that resulted in exacerbated stress or anxiety) at the hand of police officers while attending the protest. Response options for this question were coded on a continuous scale which included 0,1,2,3,4,5. If respondents indicated any level of mental trauma (meaning anything but 0 was chosen) they were asked to provide an explanation of this account in a follow-up question. The follow up open-ended question was as follows: if you indicated any level of mental trauma experienced, please use the space below to explain this incidence of mental trauma.

To measure emotional trauma respondents were asked, on a scale of 0-5 with 0 not being traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of mental trauma experienced (feelings of deep unsafety and helplessness as a result of a stressful event) at the hand of police officers while attending the protest. Response options for this question were coded on a continuous scale which included 0,1,2,3,4,5. If respondents indicated any level of emotional trauma (meaning anything but 0 was chosen) they were asked to provide an explanation of this account in a follow-up question. The follow up open-ended question was as follows: if you indicated any level of mental trauma experienced, please use the space below to explain this incidence of mental trauma.

Finally, to further identify any disparities respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: the police officers at the protests distributed fair (the

same treatment for everyone) punishment to those who broke the law. This was measured using a Likert scale and included the response options of strongly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The responses from these open-ended follow-up questions were included in the content analysis conducted by the researcher to further identify common themes that suggest the occurrence of disparities in these responses. Because the researcher relied on the experiences of protestors, quotes that may be reflective of the disparities were utilized. This was to ensure that the researcher captured the experience of the respondents to the fullest extent.

Finally, the participants were asked a series of demographic questions. Demographic questions were asked to allow the researcher to gain a more extensive background knowledge of the participants (Dobosh, 2017). This background knowledge and ability to describe the participants aided in the analysis of the data and offered statistics that are reflective of the population. Describing the participants aided in the analysis by estimating the racial/ethnic makeup as well as the age of protestors who responded to the survey. These findings can be reflective and generalizable to the larger population of protestors. These questions included what race do you most closely identify with? Which was coded as White = 1, Black or African American = 2, Hispanic or Latino = 3, Native American or Alaskan Native = 4, Asian or Pacific Islander = 5, Multiracial or Biracial = 6, and A race/ethnicity not listed here = 7. What ethnicity do you most closely identify with? Which was coded as Hispanic or Latino = 1, Not Hispanic or Latino = 2, Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano = 3, Puerto Rican = 4, Cuban = 5, and Other = 6. Other included a textbox that allowed respondents to provide an ethnicity not listed above. What is your age range? Which included a textbox allowing the respondents to respond with their current age in years. What gender do you identify most closely with? Which was left open-ended to offer the most inclusive options.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to better understand the protestor experience and identify disparities in the trauma experienced by protestors as a result of police interaction based on the topic of the demonstration. To do this, the researcher developed 3 research questions which included: Are the perceived attitudes of protestors towards police officers altered based on their experience at the protest? To answer this question respondents were first asked to indicate a level of agreeance to the statement my attitudes towards police officers were altered after attending the protest. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreeance using a Likert scale which included response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Furthermore, a thematic content analysis was conducted of an open-ended follow up question asking those who indicated any level of change in their perceptions/attitudes of police officer following the protest to explain. The second research question, are there perceived tensions between protesters and police officers based on the experience of protestors?

Initially, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreeance to the statement at the protest there was noticeable tension between protestors and police officer. Like the first question, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreeance using a Likert scale which included response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. A thematic content analysis was conducted of an open-ended follow up question asking those who indicated any tensions to further explain.

Does the type of trauma experienced at a protest differ based on the type of protest attended is the third and final research question? To answer this question, respondents were asked to choose from a provided list of protest that best fit the demonstration they attended.

After reading two articles that provide an extensive overview of forms, historical examples, and types of protest the researcher developed two definitions used to categorize the provided responses (Kenney, 2012; Wasow, 2020). These definitions were developed by the researcher after examining the protest movements related to the history of civil resistance and non-violent action. This is how the researcher established the definition in the current study for activism (Kenney, 2012). This definition included non-violent demonstrations pertaining to the objection, disapproval, or dissent of a social (alteration of social order), economic (alteration to economic systems), or environmental (alteration to the natural environment) idea or action with the intention of altering social order or a perceived greater good. For the purposes of this study protests such as Black Lives Matter were categorized under activism.

Similarly, after examining protest movements related to voting and coercive control the definition used in the current study for political was developed (Wasow, 2020). This definition included a demonstration pertaining to the objection, disapproval, or dissent of a political or government led idea or action. For the purposes of the current study protests such as Stop the Steal were categorized as political.

Respondents were then asked on a scale of 0-5 to indicate the level of physical, mental, and emotional trauma they experienced at the hands of the police while attending the protest. It should be mentioned that respondents were asked to indicate this trauma in three separate questions. So, for example, to measure physical trauma respondents were asked on a scale of 0-5 with 0 not being traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of physical

trauma experienced (serious injury to the body e.g., contusions or bruises) at the hand of police officers while attending the protest.

These responses were then used to run a t-test which involved using the three types of traumas (Physical, Emotional, and Mental) experienced as the independent variable and comparing it to multiple dependent variables which for this study included the two categories of protest defined (Political and Activism). Comparing these provided a t-statistic identifying whether the data was statistically significant. The results were disaggregated into three sections which first include the demographics of the sample. The second section includes the results of the thematic content analysis conducted on the first and second research questions. The final section includes the results from the analysis of variance test that was conducted to answer the third and final research question.

Demographics

The demographics for the study sample can be found in Table 5.1. The sample was derived from college-aged students currently attending the University of Northern Colorado. Criteria for the sample included being a currently enrolled student, over the age of 18 years old, and having been to a protest at some point in one's life. The researcher chose to use college age students for the sample not only for convenience but because college students have a longstanding history of participation in demonstrations and protests. The final sample ($N = 54$), which was comprised of mostly female identifying individuals (65.5%), White (15.39%), 19 years of age (22.4%), non-Hispanic/Latino 41.4%, and employed part-time (15.96%). When asked to choose which protest fit the attended demonstration the best, 62.26% of respondents reported having attended a Black Lives Matter protest. There was a three-way tie between Women's rights protest, gun laws, other with a total percentage of 7.55% of respondents. Anti-

Abortion, “Stop the Steal”, and alt-rights protest also had a three-way tie for a total percentage of 1.89%. Finally, LGBTQ and pro-choice protest tied with a total percentage of 3.77%.

Table 5.1

Demographic characteristics of sample (N=57)

Measure	Item	Frequencies	%	
Gender	Male	9	15.5	
	Female	38	65.5	
	Other	1	1.7	
Age	18	13	22.4	
	19	5	8.6	
	20	12	20.7	
	21	7	12.1	
	21	1	1.7	
	23	2	3.4	
	24	1	1.7	
	30	1	1.7	
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	23	39.7	
	Not Hispanic/Latino	24	41.4	
Race	American Indian or Alaskan Native	2	3.4	
	Asian	3	5.2	
	Black or African American	7	12.1	
	White	27	46.6	
	Mixed Racial Background	5	8.6	
	Employment	Yes, full time	4	6.9
		Yes, part time	28	48.3
No, currently unemployed		1	1.7	
In school full time		5	8.6	
In school part time		0	0	
In school and working		10	17.2	

Content Analysis

A content analysis was conducted on the six open-ended follow up questions included in the survey. Each initial question asked respondents to either rate their agreeance with a statement such as my attitudes towards police officers were altered after attending the protest. Or on a scale of 0-5 to rate the level of emotional, physical, and mental trauma experienced while attending the protest at the hands of police officers. If respondents chose to agree or strongly agree with the statement or indicated any level of trauma meaning the respondent chose options 1-5, a response to a follow up question was requested asking them to explain their experience. Using these responses, the researcher was able to identify three themes relevant to the content provided. These themes included trauma experienced (mental, physical, and emotion), attitudes and perception changes, and violence and force of police officers.

Attitudes and Perception Changes

The first theme derived from the content analysis was the change in attitudes and perceptions of protestors after attending the protest. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the statement my attitudes were altered after attending the protest. They were given the answer choices of strongly agree which was coded as 1, agree which was coded as 2, disagree which was coded as 3, and strongly disagree which was coded as 4. When running frequencies on this question the mode was reported at 3. This suggests that the large majority of respondents (36.2%) indicated that their attitudes towards police officers had not been altered after attending the protest. However, the mean was reported at 2.34 which indicates a number of respondents (22.4%) indicated some level of alteration in their attitudes towards police officers after attending the protest.

Moreover, when conducting the content analysis on the open-ended follow-up which included if you indicated that your attitude toward police officers were altered after attending the protest, please explain respondents reported experiencing a noticeable alteration. For example, a participant reported, “To be completely transparent, I had a level of mistrust with police officers already but seeing firsthand their disregard to citizens really solidified my feelings” (Respondent 30, Black Lives Matter Protest). The inability of protestors to fully trust police officers after multiple incidences at the protest was identified by numerous respondents as the reasoning behind their altered attitudes. Another respondent reported, “I already did not trust the police, and this only made my distrust for police officers grow” (Respondent 25, Pro-Choice Protest). These findings suggest that there was already a level of mistrust and/or negative ideologies towards police officers for a number of respondents. Once having experienced a negative encounter while attending a protest this mistrust and/or these negative ideologies grew representing this alteration. For example, another respondent even went as far as to report, “I do not believe police should exist in our communities now” (Respondent 18, Black Lives Matter Protest). While this can be seen as extreme, this is the harsh reality for a number of individuals who have had negative interaction with police officers while attending these demonstrations.

Respondents also reported that these alterations have generated a new level of fear when having normal contact with police officers. For example, “I have become so much more wary of going to the police for anything. I fear for myself and others whenever I have to communicate with anyone in law enforcement” (Respondent 49, The Women’s March). These findings are consistent with the notion that there is already a sense of mistrust towards law enforcement (Andrew, 2020). This statement is representative of the altered and heightened mistrust in law

enforcement officials. Overall, negative encounters with police officers at these protests lead to a negative alteration in attitudes towards and perceptions of police officers.

Tensions and Violence/Force of Police Officers

The second theme that emerged was tensions and violence/force of police officers at the protest. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the statement at the protest, there was noticeable tension between protestors and police officers. They were given the answer choices of strongly agree which was coded as 1, agree which was coded as 2, disagree which was coded as 3, and strongly disagree which was coded as 4. When running a descriptive test on this question the mode was reported as both 1 and 2 which equate to both strongly agree and agree. Findings suggest that the majority of respondents either strongly agreed (25.9%) or agree (25.9%) that there were noticeable tensions between protestors and police officers at the protest. Given a scale of 0-5 with 0 being no violence and 5 being extreme violence, respondents were asked to indicate the level of violence experienced as a result of police interaction. After running a descriptive test, the mode for this question was reported as 0. This indicated that the large majority (51.7%) of the respondents did not experience violence or force as a result of police interaction. However, the mean was reported as 1.18 indicating a slight occurrence of experienced violence as a result of police interaction. What is meant by this is that while 0 is the number in the dataset that occurred most frequently the average level of violence experienced was 1.18. This indicated that there is some level of violence experienced by protestors at the hands of police officers although there was no significance.

When conducting the content analysis many respondents reported the use of force, they deemed was excessive. For example, “my friend was shot in the face by a rubber bullet by DPD” (Respondent 50, Black Lives Matter Protest). The reported use of force was a common finding in

much of what the respondents reported. Another respondent expressed “I saw the hostility in police officers’ treatment of other protesters. They yelled and threatened with violence in an attempt to corral protesters a certain way or to get us to disband” (Respondent 33, LGBTQ Rights Protest). Overall, findings show that there are some perceived tensions between protesters and police officers and the occurrence of force.

Trauma Experienced

To answer the third research question does the type of trauma experienced at a protest differ based on the type of protest attended? The current study examined the mental, physical, and emotional trauma experienced by protesters as a result of police interaction at these protests. This was done to examine whether protesters were experiencing different levels of physical, mental, and emotional trauma based on the topic of the protest they were attending. Each form of trauma was defined by the researcher so that the respondents could make a clear distinction between and understanding of the three forms of trauma. For the purposes of this study, mental trauma was defined as damage in the mind that resulted in exacerbated stress or anxiety. Examples of mental trauma include but are not limited to overly emotional reactions, overwhelming feelings, and trouble with future interactions (Cleveland Clinic, 2020). Physical trauma was defined as serious injury to the body which can include bruises, cuts, contusions, and broken bones. Lastly, emotional trauma was defined as feelings of deep unsafety and helplessness as a result of a stressful event. Examples of emotional trauma include but are not limited to feeling tired, anxious, increasing physical distress, and increased fatigue.

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 0-5 with 0 being no trauma at all and 5 being extreme trauma the level of trauma they experienced. This question was asked in three variations to so that each form of trauma was measured and analyzed separately. Respondents were given

the chance to explain any indication of trauma they had experienced. Numerous participants reported the occurrence of mental, emotional, and physical trauma to some extent. When running frequencies on the closed-ended survey questions related to the occurrence of trauma the mode for all three types of possible traumas was 0. This finding suggests that the overwhelming majority of the participants in the survey did not experience the occurrence of mental (55.2%), physical (79.3%), or emotional trauma (53.4%) when examined on a continuous scale of 0-5. However, the mean was reported as 1.39 for emotional trauma, 1.24 for mental trauma, and .24 for physical trauma indicating a slight occurrence of these types of traumas.

Furthermore, those who experienced these types of traumas provided meaningful quotes to further express the results of these traumatic occurrences. For example, one respondent states, “seeing police officers using physical force on people during these protests really made me feel for the people whose voice can’t be heard. Many people, including myself are scared to speak out for reasons of being harmed and silenced” (Respondent 9, Pro-Choice Protest). This response was provided when asked to explain the incidence of emotional trauma and speaks volume about the long-lasting effects of these traumatic occurrences.

Another respondent states, “seeing peaceful protestors bleeding from their head because of a rubber bullet and others crying because of pepper spray was traumatic” (Respondent 15, Black Lives Matter Protest). This statement indicated the presence of second-hand trauma which according to the American Counseling Association, (2021) “is the result of witnessing or interaction with those who have experienced a traumatic event” (p.1). This finding suggest that not only is personally experiencing these types of traumas detrimental but so is the mere interaction with someone who has. This finding speaks to a great public health dilemma referred to as vicarious trauma. Protestors if not experiencing the trauma themselves are experiencing

traumatic residue resulting in similar experiences of strain. Seeing other peaceful protestors being met with hostile treatment can have the same injurious effects as personally experiencing these traumas.

Independent Measures T-Tests

In order to answer the third and final research question, determining whether disparities are present in the trauma experienced by protestors at the hands of police officers a series of t-test was conducted. This parametric test was run because it allowed the researcher to analyze the difference between the mean scores for the two groups included in this study. For this study, the two groups used for the independent variable were the two difference types of protest categories created by the researcher.

These two groups were then compared to the three types of traumas one may experience while attending a protest. Analyzing these groups using an independent samples t-test allowed the researcher to compare the means identifying if there was a difference between those who attended a protest categorized as activism when compared to physical, mental, and emotional trauma and protest categorized as political when compared to physical, mental, and emotional trauma. If there were significant difference between these means, that would demonstrate that there are perceived disparities related to the trauma experienced by protestors at the hands of police officers while attending these protests.

If there were no significant differences between these means, then that would suggest that there are not perceived disparities related to the trauma experienced. This information allowed the researcher to answer the third research question: Does the type of trauma experienced at a protest differ based on the type of protest attended? Respondents were asked to choose from a list of 24 options the protest that best fit the demonstration they most recently attending. These

choices were then sorted by the researcher into two categories which included political and activism. These two categories were used as the independent variable and the three types of traumas served as the dependent variables.

A series of three independent sample t-tests were run to assess whether protest categorized as either political or activism differ in the mental, physical, and emotional trauma faced at the hands of police officers. For physical trauma, the analysis failed to reveal a difference between the groups, as political ($M = .00$, $SD = .00$) reported similar physical trauma experienced as activism ($M = .29$, $SD = .80$), $t(44) = -1.011$, $p = .317$. For mental trauma, the analysis failed to reveal a difference between the groups, as political ($M = .50$, $SD = 1.41$) reported similar mental trauma experienced as activism ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 1.77$), $t(44) = -1.381$, $p = .174$. For emotional trauma, the analysis failed to reveal a difference between the groups, as political ($M = .50$, $SD = 1.41$) reported similar emotional trauma experienced as activism ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 1.97$), $t(44) = -1.504$, $p = .140$.

Because there was no statistical significance found between any of the groups, there are no perceived disparities in the traumas experienced as a result of police interaction based solely on the kind of protest. These incidences of emotional trauma were reported to be experienced as both first and secondhand trauma. For example, one respondent describes their experience with firsthand trauma as “extreme feelings of being unsafe” (Respondent 11, LGBTQ Rights Protest). On the other hand, a number of respondents reported incidence of secondhand trauma such as “watching other people get hit or hearing about the person who lost their eye in the Denver protest was extremely unsettling. It could’ve been anyone and that was distressing” (Respondent 15, Black Lives Matter Protest). Both examples provide us with a direct look at the lingering effects related to emotional trauma that negative experiences with police officers can have.

Discussion

The current study sought to capture the experience of protestors through a series of questions that measured trauma experienced, altered attitudes and perceptions, and perceived tensions. To measure these the current study asked the following research questions: Are the perceived attitudes of protestors towards police officers altered based on their experience at the protest? Are there perceived tensions between protesters and police officers based on the experience of protestors? Does the type of trauma experienced at a protest differ based on the type of protest attended? A goal of this study was to capture and explore the experience of protestors in America. Specifically, this study sought to identify, if at all, the disparities present relating to trauma experienced as a result of police interaction; whether the experiences had while attending these demonstrations alter the perceived attitudes and perceptions of these protestors; and whether there were tensions between protestors and police officers that lead to negative outcomes.

Despite the lack of statistical significance, this study provided a firsthand look at the experiences of protestors once they have encountered police officers. This firsthand look speaks volume about the perceived alterations that these respondents experienced after attending these protests. We not only gained a better understanding of this experience, but were also able to answer the first research question of are the perceived attitudes of protestors towards police officers altered based on their experience at the protest? From the content analysis we see that a number of respondents reported negative interactions with police officers at these protests. These negative interactions led to a reported sense of alienation and mistrust resulting in respondents' alterations of their attitudes towards police officers. For example, one respondent shared "I see them much more negatively now" (Respondent 22, Pro-Choice Protest). Findings such as this are

consistent with current literature that speaks to the sense of mistrust and alienation as a result of these negative interaction (Perry et al., 2017). This mistrust not only affected the behavior of the protestors while participating in the protest, but it also affected their experience and interaction with police officers after the demonstration. For example, one respondent reports “I have become so much more wary of going to the police for anything. I fear for myself and others whenever I have to communicate with anyone in law enforcement” (Respondent 49, Women’s Rights Protest). This suggests that these negative experiences and sense of alienation had such an effect that individuals become cautious of future police interaction.

When examining and answering the second research question are there perceived tensions between protesters and police officers based on the experience of protestors? It was found that the majority of respondents reported the presence of perceived tensions. For example, one respondent shared, “the violence that I experienced was from the increased police presence at the walkout from my school, the police were there with weapons and as the event went on the tensions increased, people were pushing and so were the police” (Respondent 34, Black Lives Matter Protest). Many respondents also shared that this tension was the result of a paramilitary response by police officers. This indicates that once police officers arrived dressed in riot gear holding less than lethal weaponry the tensions rose. One respondent shared, “I saw swat use pellet guns and smoke bombs in the streets of Denver where people were marching peacefully” (Respondent 44, Black Lives Matter Protest). There were also reports of the use of rubber bullets, pepper spray, gases, shields, and militarized vehicles. The use of force and increased paramilitarism was another finding consistent with the current literature (Perry et al., 2017). Results showed that tactics like the use of rubber bullets, pepper spray, and tactical gear by

police officers in unfortunate circumstances escalated these demonstrations causing this tension between protestors and police officers.

Finally, when examining and answering the final research question does the type of trauma experienced at a protest differ based on the type of protest attended? It was found that there was no statistical significance relating to the types of traumas experienced based on the type of protest attended. For starters, physical trauma was not experienced by the majority of the sample at all. This was a consistent finding in both protest that were categorized at political and activism. Moreover, while there was some indication of mental and emotional trauma, the mean scores were not statistically significant. This lack of significance for these types of traumas were also reported for both categories of protest. This indicates that despite protestors reporting experiencing some emotional and mental trauma as a result of police interaction, these experiences did not differ based on the topics of the protest. This indicates that there are other factors associated with this finding that should be studied in future research.

Limitations

A main limitation of the current study was that it only examined these aspects using college students attending the University of Northern Colorado. Gathering the current sample from one institution does not make this study completely illustrative of the protestor experience. The standpoints and experiences of others who have attended protest in the past but are not included in the current study are absent. Broadening recruitment practices and participant qualifications would have aided in making the current study more generalizable. This could have also aided in the increase of the sample size of the study which was another limitation.

Like the first limitation, a small sample size does not make the current study generalizable to the average protestor experience. Accurate recollection of the event is also

another limitation of the current study. The current study asked for information relating to the most recent protest attended without providing any time restrictions. For example, one respondent included information on a protest they attended in high school. Because no time parameters were provided there was no guarantee that respondents were reporting the most accurate and up to date information. Furthermore, when categorizing the protest into the two groups that served as the independent variable there was a lack of normality. There were only eight participants who took part in political protest and 34 who went to an activism protest. These findings, although not statistically significant have the possibility to serve as a reference point for future research.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although there were no significant differences found when comparing the two groups to the three types of traumas, the current study did present meaningful results. For starters, the content analysis provided a firsthand look at some of the experiences protestors have when encountering police officers at these demonstrations. From these experiences there is a clear indication that while mental and emotional trauma was not experienced by the majority of the sample and disparities are not present occurrences were reported. These occurrences specifically those relating to emotional trauma were experienced as both first and secondhand trauma. This means that whether respondents experienced this emotion trauma themselves or vicariously the result was a heightened feelings of hopelessness, depression, and lack of safety. Or having witnessed someone else's trauma caused them to feel as though they endured the trauma themselves.

This not only was a consistent finding for the current study, but it is also consistent with current research. For example, according to Aldetimi et al., (2021) "evidence shows that the constant stress of the looming threat of police violence, the actual experience of police violence, and the devastating aftermath of police brutality at a personal (first-or-second) and societal level can have tremendous effects on the mental health of people" (p.4). The stress of police violence at a protest is not constant but the occurrence of a negative interaction tends to have negative effects.

A respondent from the current study reported “Every time I see an officer now, I remember what they can do to people, and it scares me to know that I can peacefully protest and still be harmed by police officers” (Respondent 8, Women’s Rights Protest). Furthermore, we see that there were noticeable tensions between protestors and police officers. This led to a consistent mistrust between the two parties that was found to have altered the perceptions and attitudes of protestors towards police officers. This is contrary to current literature stating that macro-level experiences do not alter tensions between society and police officers (White et al., 2018). This is contrary to current research indicating that these tensions stem only from a socio-historical context.

Recommendations

While it can be agreed that tensions come from a socio-historical context findings from this study showed that macro-level experiences such as negative encounter at protest can alter attitudes/perceptions and cause tensions. Based on the findings from the current study, the following is recommended:

1. Limiting the use of militarized responses by police officers at these protests. This includes prohibiting the use of tear gas, pepper spray, and less than lethal weaponry unless a clear threat is identified.
2. Acknowledge the impact of second-hand trauma and offer resources for those who may be affected by it.
3. Strengthen community and police relations so that when protests happen there is a sense of comradery instead of this “us vs them” mentality.

Although limitations were present and served as a possible hinderance for the current study, research on this topic is important. Future research should consider increasing the sample

size to promote normality and generalizability within the sample. The right to protest is inalienable and research on this topic and understanding the experiences and interactions of protestors is important.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY TOOL

Protestor Survey

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Informed Consent Project Title: No Justice, No Peace

Researcher: Naya Russell-Coprigh, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Email:

Naya.russellcoprich@unco.edu

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the current study is to examine the experience of protestors in America. Criteria for participation includes those who have participated in a protest or demonstration, those over the age of 18, and those currently attending the University of Northern Colorado. If you chose to participate in this study, you will participate in a survey about your experience as a protestor that seeks to identify any disparities in the use of force against protestors and the prevalence of violence. Completion of the survey should take no longer than 15 - 20 minutes. After the survey is conducted, the data were assessed using both statistical and content analysis.

All responses remain confidential, and emails provided for the purposes of the raffle were kept separate from the survey responses. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Naya Russell-Coprigh at Naya.russellcoprich@unco.edu.

If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, University of Northern Colorado at nicole.morse@unco.edu or 970-351-1910.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your

decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- I have read the following information and do wish to participate in the survey (1)
- I do not wish to participate (2)

Q2 Please pick the protest that best fits the most recent protest you attended.

- Black Lives Matter (4)
- Blue Lives Matter (26)
- End Sars (5)
- Anti-Lockdown (6)
- Black Friday Amazon Protest (7)
- Election Results Protest (8)
- September Climate Strike (9)
- Juneteenth Protest (10)
- Police Lives Matter (27)
- #IRUNWITHMAUD (11)
- International Women's Day (12)
- Black Trans Lives Matter (13)
- Frontline Health Workers (14)

- Animal Rights (15)
- Pro Trump Protest (16)
- Count All Votes (17)
- The Women's March (18)
- Alt-right Protest (19)
- Stop the Steal (20)
- LGBTQ Right Protest (21)
- Pro-Choice (23)
- Gun Laws (24)
- Anti-Abortion (25)
- Other (28) _____

Q3 I see myself as an activist (one that campaigns for political change).

- Agree (1)
- Disagree (2)

Q4 On a scale of 0-5 with 0 being no violence experienced and 5 being extreme violence experienced please indicate the level of violence you experienced at the protest by police officers.

- 0 (4)

1 (5)

2 (6)

3 (7)

4 (8)

5 (9)

Q5 If you indicated any level of violence, please use the space below to explain this incidence of violence experienced.

Q6 On a scale of 0-5 with 0 being no violence experienced and 5 being extreme violence experienced please indicate the level of violence you experienced at the protest by other protestors.

0 (4)

1 (5)

2 (6)

3 (7)

4 (8)

5 (9)

Q7 If you indicated any level of violence, please use the space below to explain this incidence of violence you engaged in.

Q10 On a scale of 0-5 with 0 not being traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of physical trauma experienced (serious injury to the body e.g., contusions or bruises) at the hand of police officers while attending the protest.

0 (4)

1 (5)

2 (6)

3 (7)

4 (8)

5 (9)

Q11 If you indicated any level of physical trauma experienced, please use the space below to explain this incidence of physical trauma.

Q12 On a scale of 0-5 with 0 being not traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of mental trauma (damage to the mind that resulted in exacerbated stress or anxiety) at the hands of the police while attending the protest?

0 (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

Q13 If you indicated any level of mental trauma experienced, please use the space below to explain this incidence of mental trauma.

Q14 On a scale of 0-5 with 0 being not traumatic at all and 5 being extremely traumatic indicate the level of emotional trauma (feelings of deep unsafety and helplessness as a result of a stressful event) at the hands of the police while attending the protest?

0 (1)

1 (2)

2 (3)

3 (4)

4 (5)

5 (6)

Q15 If you indicated any level or emotional trauma experienced, please use the space below to explain this incidence of emotional trauma.

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Evaluate the following statements

Q16 The police officers at the protests distributed fair (the same treatment for everyone) punishment to those who broke the law?

Strongly Agree (1)

Agree (2)

Disagree (4)

Strongly disagree (5)

Q17 My attitudes towards police officers were altered after attending the protest?

Strongly Agree (1)

- Agree (2)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q18 If you indicated that your attitude toward police officers were altered after attending the protest please explain.

Q19 I felt like my safety was being threatened during the protest.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (7)
- Disagree (9)
- Strongly Disagree (10)

Q20 At the protest there was noticeable tension between protestors and police officers.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Disagree (4)

Strongly disagree (5)

Q21 This tension led to violence (unlawful physical force or an attempt to intimidate) by the police officers at the protest?

Strongly Agree (1)

Agree (2)

Disagree (3)

Strongly Disagree (4)

End of Block: Evaluate the following statements

Start of Block: Demographic Characteristics

Q22 What is your current age in years?

Q23 What is your gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Other: please specify (3) _____

Q24 What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic/Latino (1)
- Not Hispanic/Latino (2)

Q25 What Race do you most identify with?

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Mixed Racial Background (6) _____
- Other (7) _____

Q26 Are you currently employed?

- Yes, full time (35 or more hours per week) (1)
- Yes, part time (less than 35 hours per week) (2)
- No, currently unemployed (3)

- Receiving disability (SSDI) (4)
- In school full time (5)
- In school part time (6)
- In school and working (7)
- Other: (8) _____

Q27 Anything else you would like the researcher to know.

End of Block: Demographic Characteristics

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Date: 03/30/2022
Principal Investigator: Naya Russell-Coprigh

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 03/30/2022

Protocol Number: [2201034934](#)

Protocol Title: No Justice, No Peace: An Examination of Protestor Experience Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(702) for research involving

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require

- protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 via e-mail nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website: <http://hhs.gov/ohrp> and <https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/>

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).

You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this