**Crowd Reactions to the Police Use of Force
at the 2017 Phoenix Trump Rally**

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Abstract

This study examines crowd reactions to police use of force at a protest outside of a 2017 campaign-style rally held by U.S. President Donald Trump in Phoenix, Arizona. We rely on a mixed-method analysis that draws on three primary data sources: direct observations, video footage of the protest, and interviews with protesters. We use thematic analysis of the interview responses to identify a set of themes characterizing protesters' psychological and behavioral responses to the police use of force against the crowd. Our analysis integrates the findings from this thematic analysis with evidence from direct observations and video footage. Our findings reveal that the police use of force generated a mix of psychological and behavioral reactions. Respondents described having experienced a range of emotional reactions, including anger, frustration, fear, and concern for the well-being of vulnerable people in the crowd. The two principal behavioral responses were oppositional (expressing anger toward police) and altruistic (providing aid to vulnerable people). While oppositional reactions are well-known in the literature on the police response to protests, much less is known about altruistic reactions in this setting. Future research should seek to clarify the factors that influence both oppositional and altruistic reactions in crowds.

Understanding Crowd Reactions to the Police Use of

Force at the 2017 Phoenix Trump Rally

On August 22, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump held a campaign-style rally in downtown Phoenix, Arizona. The rally attracted thousands of Trump supporters hoping to see the President give his speech inside the Phoenix Convention Center. The rally took place only ten days after a controversial "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia where a white supremacist drove a car into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing one and injuring nineteen others. In the aftermath of the violence in Charlottesville, Trump and his administration came under intense criticism for blaming "both sides" for the violence (Shear & Haberman, 2017). Phoenix's mayor, Greg Stanton, issued a statement asking Trump to delay the Phoenix rally while the nation was "still healing from the tragic events in Charlottesville" (Barbash, 2017). President Trump did not honor Mayor Stanton's request.

In the hours leading up to President Trump's speech, thousands of protesters lined the streets outside of the Convention Center. Trump supporters trying to get into the Convention Center waited in a long line that encompassed multiple city blocks. At all but a few locations, the two groups remained separated by police officers and an extensive network of police barricades. Although the protesters and the Trump supporters engaged in heated verbal exchanges, these interactions remained largely peaceful, requiring little direct intervention by police. However, shortly after President Trump finished his speech inside the Phoenix Convention Center, violence erupted between the police and anti-Trump protesters outside, with protesters throwing bottles and other objects at police, and the police deploying a variety of "less lethal" munitions and chemical agents to disperse the crowd and end the largely peaceful protest.

Drawing heavily from theory and research on the social psychology of crowds (e.g., Stott & Drury, 2000; Stott & Reicher, 1998), this paper examines crowd reactions to the police use of force at the 2017 Phoenix Trump rally. We examine the chronology of events at the rally, including the behaviors of police, Trump rally attendees, and anti-Trump protesters. Our analysis relies on three primary data sources: direct observation of the protest, video footage of the protest, and interviews with crowd members conducted after the protest. Our results add to a growing body of research on the dynamics of crowd events, particularly the relationships between protesters and police. One of the unique contributions of this research is its detailed description and explanation of protesters' behavioral and psychological reactions to police actions. In this case, the police use of force led protesters to turn their attention away from Trump supporters and toward police. This phenomenon, in which protesters turn their focus toward the police, is well documented in the crowd psychology literature (e.g., HMIC, 2009; Stott & Reicher, 1998b). However, a second and unexpected finding emerged from our analysis of the interview data. Protesters also reported feeling, and acting upon, a powerful sense of obligation to protect vulnerable people from the police. Findings from our analysis of the 2017 Phoenix Trump rally are useful for improving our understanding of how crowds react to police use of force, and how to develop more appropriate protest policing practices.

Background

Protests are potent mechanisms for achieving social change and they have played an instrumental role in securing the freedoms that characterize modern liberal democracies (Martin, 1994; Velut, 2014). American democracy was forged out of people's struggles against colonial oppression. Protests are culturally and historically meaningful in the United States and they are

given robust constitutional protections (Maguire, 2015; Piven, 2006; Velut, 2014). U.S. history is

filled with examples of people assembling to express their views about a variety of social and

political issues, including racial justice, the Vietnam War, women's rights, globalization, the

Covid-19 pandemic, and many others. Unfortunately, while protests are a recurring theme in

U.S. history, so too are efforts by local, state, and federal governments to repress these social

movements (Earl et al., 2003; Piven, 2006; Velut, 2014). Governments exert firm control over

social movements for a variety of reasons: to preserve order, repress dissent, and maintain power

(e.g., Earl, 2003; Huntington, 1968; Tilly, 2005; Tilly et al., 2001).

While there are several agents through which governments repress social movements, in

the United States, the police have historically played the most prominent role in controlling

protests (Velut, 2014). In general, police are the principal mechanism by which the state

distributes non-negotiable force among its citizens (Bittner, 1985). In the context of protests, the

police rely on a variety of coercive mechanisms such as controlling where crowds can gather,

issuing dispersal orders, using force, and making arrests. Aside from conventional uses of force,

police rely on various types of "less lethal" force to control protesters, including chemical agents

(such as tear gas and pepper spray), kinetic impact munitions (rubber bullets, PepperBalls®,

beanbag rounds, foam baton rounds, etc.), acoustic weapons and diversionary devices (flash-

bang grenades and Long-Range Acoustical Devices[1]), and other crowd-control tools (such as

water cannons) (Aytaç, Schiumerini, & Stokes, 2017). Though a detailed account of the methods

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[1] A Long-Range Acoustical Device (LRAD) is an amplifier that channels sound waves in a specific direction. In the context of crowd management, it is primarily used to enable police or other authorities to issue commands to the crowd at a sufficient volume to ensure that people within the crowd can hear the commands. The LRAD also has an "area denial" feature that emits loud, piercing tones that are intended to disperse a crowd by causing auditory discomfort. When used improperly, these tones can cause permanent hearing damage. For that reason, a federal court has ruled that the LRAD's area denial function constitutes "a significant degree of force" (*Edrei v. Bratton*, 2018).

used by police to control protests is beyond the scope of this paper, below we provide a brief

review of the literature associated with the police response to protests.

Protest Policing

Social movement scholars have identified three eras of protest policing strategies and

tactics in the United States since the 1960s. The predominant approach in the 1960s and early

1970s was the *escalated force* model (McPhail et al., 1998). The police response to protests

during this era shaped the nature of the U.S. civil rights movement (see Bloom & Breines, 2003)

and the Chicano rights movement (see Escobar, 1993). In the escalated force model, police rely

on the use of force as a principal tool for controlling protests and dispersing crowds. Police

embracing this perspective continue to escalate the threat or use of force until they achieve the

expected level of compliance from protesters (McPhail et al., 1998). The escalated force model

resulted in unnecessary conflict and violence between police and protesters and contributed to

some of the nation's darkest moments (Maguire, 2015).

The *negotiated management* model emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. It reduced the

frequency and intensity of conflict between police and protesters (Gillham et al., 2013). Police

adopting this approach demonstrate a higher tolerance for disorder and place a premium on

respecting and facilitating the First Amendment rights of protesters (McPhail et al., 1998). Police

communicate with protest planners beforehand to discuss what will be tolerated and what will

not be tolerated (McPhail et al., 1998). This model fell out of favor among many police

departments following two historic events. The first was the so-called Battle in Seattle which

involved violent confrontations between police and protesters (and millions of dollars in property

damage) at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Seattle,

Washington. The second were the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. Both events

led many U.S. police departments to embrace more militaristic approaches for handling crowd

events, including a shift away from the negotiated management model toward a more repressive

approach known as the *strategic incapacitation* model (Gillham et al., 2013).

Similar to the escalated force model, the strategic incapacitation model is characterized

by a limited tolerance for community disruption and the exercise of First Amendment rights by

protesters (Gillham & Noakes, 2007). Police adopting this approach rely heavily on making

arrests, using force, conducting surveillance on protesters, and exerting rigid control over access

to space (including the controversial crowd containment strategy known as encirclement or

"kettling"), among other features (Gillham & Noakes, 2007). Some scholars differentiate

between two categories of strategic incapacitation: the *command and control model*, and the

Miami model (Vitale, 2007).[2] The command and control model, which is known as the "soft hat"

approach, is the less aggressive of the two. It resembles a "broken windows" style of policing

because it is premised on the notion that minor disorder leads to more serious forms of disorder

(Vitale, 2005). Based on this perspective, police look to micromanage all aspects of a protest by

using restrictive permitting procedures; controlling public space using police lines, barricades,

and other methods to disrupt protesters' movements; and making arrests for even minor

infractions of the law (Vitale, 2007). The Miami model is known as the "hard hat" approach

because police rely heavily on a militaristic appearance and demeanor, wearing riot gear, using

less-lethal weapons frequently, and making arrests under conditions that often do not warrant

such approaches (Vitale, 2007, 2009).

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[2] The "Miami model" is named for the police response to protests in Miami in 2003. During the protests, police organized "an overwhelming show of force and behaved aggressively toward protesters in their efforts to secure downtown Miami" (Maguire, 2015, p. 84). Due to alleged constitutional violations by police during the protests, the City of Miami and other local governments agreed to legal settlements costing more than $1.5 million.

Aggressive approaches to the police handling of protests in the United States raised significant public alarm on many occasions in the years leading up to the 2017 Phoenix Trump rally. For example, during the Occupy movement in 2011 and 2012, media coverage routinely depicted U.S. police wearing riot gear, making mass arrests, and using force against peaceful protesters and journalists (Gillham et al., 2013; Maguire & Oakley, 2020; Tyler, et al., 2018). These same issues arose again during the civil unrest in and around Ferguson, Missouri after the 2014 killing of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old Black man, by a White police officer (Cobbina, 2019; Maguire, 2015). Aggressive police (and prosecutorial) responses were also seen during protests surrounding the inauguration of President Trump in January 2017, resulting in numerous civil rights violations by police. As a result, the District of Columbia paid out $1.6 million in legal settlements and federal prosecutors had to drop charges against more than 200 arrestees (Maguire, 2022b).

The aggressive approaches used by police in these and many other U.S. protests are consistent with general trends in protest policing practices in the United States (Maguire, 2015; Gillham et al., 2013; Vitale, 2005, 2009). However, these aggressive approaches are based on outdated and inaccurate assumptions about crowd dynamics. Such approaches often have the perverse effect of *increasing*, rather than preventing or reducing, conflict and violence. Theory and research from crowd psychology are useful for understanding these perverse effects and thinking about how to develop fairer and more effective protest management strategies.

Crowd Psychology

Classical views of crowds embrace the notion of a mob mentality in which ideas, emotions, and behaviors spread through crowds rapidly and people have difficulty resisting

them. Such views were expressed most clearly by French psychologist Gustave Le Bon, whose

classic book, *The Crowd*, has often been called one of the most influential psychology books

ever written. Le Bon (1897, p. xiii) argued that crowds are inherently destructive and that anyone

within a crowd "is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided

by his will." This assumption underpins the *escalated force* and *Miami model* approaches to

crowd control. These approaches view crowds as mindless and intrinsically dangerous, therefore

the only way to handle them is by either threatening or using force. Though Le Bon's

perspectives on crowds remain influential, leading crowd psychology researchers argue, based

on decades of research evidence, that they are "not only wrong, but dangerously wrong"

(Reicher, et al., 2004, p. 565). Unfortunately, Le Bon's outdated and inaccurate perspectives on

crowd psychology and behavior are consistent with the logic underlying contemporary police

responses to protests in the United States and elsewhere.

What does modern crowd psychology teach us about crowd dynamics? Research in many

settings shows that crowds are typically heterogeneous, consisting of people with distinct norms

and values. For example, protesters tend to have widely varying perspectives on the morality and

utility of using transgressive protest tactics such as property damage and violence (Gillham &

Noakes, 2007; Maguire, Barak, et al., 2018, 2020). Although people within crowds can be

influenced by those around them, the social contagion processes described by Le Bon are

dramatically overstated. Moreover, crowds are not inherently irrational or destructive as argued

by Le Bon. In fact, research has found that crowds often display tremendously rational and

prosocial behavior, even in the most challenging of circumstances (e.g., Drury et al., 2009b;

Drury & Reicher, 2010).

To truly understand the psychology and behavior of crowds, one must understand the *social identities* of the people comprising them. Social identity refers to how people conceive of themselves based on the social categories or groupings to which they believe they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity plays an important role in one of the leading theories of crowd psychology known as the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM). According to the ESIM, social identities are dynamic and can shift in crowd settings as people interact with in-group members (such as fellow protest participants) and out-group members (such as counter-protesters or police). These interactions help crowd participants determine their position in relation to others and the appropriate forms of action flowing from that position (Drury & Reicher, 2009).

One of the most important contributions of the ESIM is the idea that the actions of outgroups can have a profound influence on the social identities and consequent behaviors of protest participants. For example, when police crack down on protests in an indiscriminate manner that is perceived by participants as illegal or otherwise inappropriate, those participants will often turn their focus, and their sense of grievance, toward the police. By taking indiscriminate action against the crowd as a whole, police can set in motion psychological changes within the crowd that promote conflict and violence. Protesters who arrive at an event with moderate viewpoints and a general sense of respect for the law and its agents may begin to align with more radical protesters in collective opposition to the police (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Stott & Drury, 2000). Drury and Reicher (2009) observe that when police action is seen as both indiscriminate and illegitimate, the entire crowd will often unite around a sense of opposition to the police and those they are thought to be protecting.

Research conducted during the Occupy movement found that protesters' perceptions of procedurally unjust treatment by police influenced several consequential outcomes, including

people's support for behaving violently toward police (Maguire et al., 2018, 2020), self-reported violent resistance toward police (Tyler et al., 2018), and engagement in civil disobedience (Snipes et al., 2019). Taken together, decades of research on the police response to crowds suggests that taking overly aggressive and indiscriminate action against crowds is generally counterproductive, triggering collective opposition to police and increasing the likelihood of otherwise preventable conflict and violence.

The Current Study

The current study seeks to understand the crowd's reactions to the police use of force at the 2017 Phoenix Trump rally. The paper describes an ethnographic study of the conflict that emerged between police and protesters. Ethnographic methods are important when seeking to understand the dynamic relationships and reciprocal exchanges that occur between police and crowds. Ethnography allows researchers to capture the complex processes that unfold during crowd events (Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000). Our primary goal is to provide a detailed account of the psychological and behavioral changes that occurred in the crowd as a result of the police use of force. Our results are consistent with crowd psychology research which finds that protesters turn their animus toward police when subjected to indiscriminate and illegitimate use of enforcement authority by police. However, our findings also document a clear pattern of rational and prosocial reactions by protesters that represent a unique contribution to the literature on the policing of protests. Our findings provide a useful account of how crowds react to abuses of authority by agents of the state.

Methods

Data Gathering Strategy

The current study draws upon three primary data sources to understand the sequence of events during the protest associated with the 2017 Phoenix Trump Rally. First, relying on similar observational methods used to examine protests in the past (see Adang, 2013; Gillham et al., 2013; Gillham & Noakes, 2007; Stott & Drury, 2000; Vitale, 2007), five researchers conducted direct observations of the protests occurring immediately outside of the Trump rally. Given the sheer size of the crowd, which spread out across multiple city blocks, the observation team split up into three parts. One team of two observers was assigned to the north side of the Phoenix Convention Center, where supporters were entering the rally. A second team of two observers was assigned to the south side of the Convention Center where supporters joined a long line to enter the rally (see Figure 1). The first author floated between both positions. Observations were recorded through both notetaking and audio recording devices. Once the observations were completed, each observer independently constructed a chronology of events based on their notes.

—INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE—

Second, we draw on video footage of the event from many different sources, including journalists, police, and others who were present at the event. Video footage is useful for reconstructing processes and events and understanding temporal sequences, including "what happened when, following what, and leading to which subsequent development" (Nassauer & Legewie, 2021, p. 151). Video footage serves as a useful adjunct to our observational data, particularly because it was sometimes difficult for our observers to see events clearly from their position within a large crowd. Because the protest we observed was geographically dispersed

across several city blocks, video footage from multiple angles was especially useful for building

a consensual account of the chronology of events.

Third, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 individuals who attended the

protest. We recruited them by contacting individuals and organizations who had posted on social

media (Twitter and Facebook) that they had attended the protest. We also asked those who we

interviewed for the contact information of people who had attended the protest and who may be

willing to participate. The interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Of the 11 interviews, we

conducted four in person and seven over the phone or on Skype. Four interviewees were female

and seven were male. They ranged in age from 22 to 54 years old. Three of them were students,

and eight of them were employed full time. They reported various levels of experience with prior

protests. For some, this was the first protest in which they had participated, while others had

attended numerous protests. During the interview, participants were asked about their reasons for

attending the protest, their overall experience while there, and the emotions they experienced at

different points in the event. While the semi-structured interview protocol contained several

prompts to help us understand how protesters thought and felt about the event, it was open-ended

enough to allow us to discover patterns we did not anticipate. In addition to our three primary

data sources, we also relied on a variety of secondary data sources such as media and police

accounts of the event as well as photographs posted to social media by attendees.

Analytic Approach

The analytic approach used in this paper has two components. First, consistent with other

studies of crowd and police dynamics, we begin by constructing a chronology of events during

the 2017 Phoenix Trump rally (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000; Stott & Drury, 2000). Our intent is

for this account to be descriptive and consensual, therefore we exclude any features in which

there is evidence of disagreement between different sources. This chronology of events is useful

for orienting the reader and identifying patterns of behavior that will be examined in greater

detail in the analysis that follows (Drury & Reicher, 2000).

      Second, our analysis of behavioral and psychological reactions to the police use of force

relies on thematic analysis, a popular approach to identifying themes in the analysis of

qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In thematic analysis, themes are often

developed inductively through coding and analysis. They are treated as "the outcome of the

analytic process, rather than a starting point" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 20). Themes are also

sometimes developed deductively based on the researcher's familiarity with existing scholarship

(Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Our general orientation from the outset was to use an

inductive approach in which themes emerged from the data. However, as noted by Braun and

Clarke (2006, p. 84), researchers often find it difficult to "free themselves" from their existing

knowledge of the literature and adopt a purely inductive analysis that is not informed by that

knowledge. While conducting the analysis in this study, we were well acquainted with social

identity scholarship on police and crowds, thus it is likely that our coding and analysis was

influenced by that knowledge. Thus, our approach was similar to that of Drury and Reicher

(1999, p. 389), who noted that their analysis was based in part on "previous work on social

identity and collective action rather than derived entirely 'bottom up' from the data." While we

acknowledge the influence of our existing knowledge on the coding and analysis process, our

approach also allowed themes to emerge organically. This is demonstrated clearly in our findings

section, which notes that some of the key themes we identified were unexpected.

Chronology of Events

Physical description of location

The Phoenix Convention Center is located in downtown Phoenix. The area around the

Convention Center is heavily populated by businesses, a theatre, parking structures, office

buildings, and a church. The Convention Center is surrounded on all four sides by two-lane

streets (see Figure 1). As part of their action plan for President Trump's visit, the Phoenix Police

Department took several steps to provide a secure environment for supporters attending the rally

and protesters gathering outside the rally, including fencing and barriers to manage pedestrian

traffic around the Convention Center, and large barriers that prevented vehicles from entering

certain roads immediately adjacent to the Convention Center.

Before the rally began [5:50 – 7:00pm]

The protest against President Trump was already well underway when the research team arrived

at 2nd and Monroe at approximately 5:50 p.m. Hundreds of protesters lined the north side of

Monroe, while rally attendees moved along the south side of Monroe to enter the Convention

Center. The atmosphere was energetic but largely peaceful. The protesters directed their chants

at Trump supporters entering the rally. The two groups heckled one another. Police officers kept

the two groups separated, which appeared to have been an effective means of preventing

physical confrontations between protesters and rally attendees (Maguire, 2022a). At 6:21pm, a

photograph posted on Twitter showed two Phoenix police officers carrying weapons designed to

fire "less lethal" kinetic impact projectiles. Officers were not yet wearing full riot gear, but some

were wearing riot helmets. Several rally attendees were smiling and waving at protesters, while

others filmed the scene or took pictures and laughed. Throughout the first segment of the

observation period (from 5:50 to 7:00pm), protesters appeared to direct most of their attention –

including chants, songs, and shouts – toward rally attendees entering the Convention Center.

Although the event was mostly peaceful at this stage, police responded to a fight between the

two groups at 3rd and Washington at 6:39pm. Shortly after that, officers called in reinforcements

and used police tape to keep the two groups separate.

During the rally [7:00 – 8:25pm]

As the start of the rally approached, some Trump supporters remained outside, but the crowd

consisted primarily of anti-Trump protesters. Numerous journalists and police officers were also

present. At approximately 7:03pm, protesters on the north side of the Convention Center threw

plastic water bottles southward across Monroe Street towards Trump supporters still waiting in

line to enter the event. In response, the PPD deployed Tactical Response Unit (TRU) officers on

the south side of Monroe Street between 1st and 5th between the two groups.[3] The PPD also

deployed a police helicopter "as a deterrent." Plainclothes officers from the Community

Response Squad were assigned "to contact and warn the groups, in an effort to cease illegal

activity" (Phoenix Police Department, 2018, p. 8). When the President began his speech inside

the Convention Center at 7:08pm, our observers noted that many of the protesters began to watch

his speech on their phones. Observers overheard several groups of protesters expressing anxiety

about the possibility that President Trump would pardon former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe

Arpaio.[4] The protest crowd also appeared to reach its largest size of the evening.

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[3] Within in the PPD, the Tactical Response Unit has primary responsibility for handling civil disturbances that are determined to require a tactical response.

[4] Joe Arpaio served as sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona from 1993 to 2017. He was a controversial figure for numerous reasons, including his reliance on racially and ethnically discriminatory policing practices. He had recently been convicted of criminal contempt for knowingly violating a federal judge's 2011 order to stop racially profiling Latino drivers in Maricopa county (Dwyer, 2017).

At approximately 7:20pm, PPD officers begin using a Long-Range Acoustical Device (LRAD) to issue warnings instructing protesters at 2nd and Monroe "to demonstrate peacefully, not to cross the fence and police lines, and not to throw objects" (Phoenix Police Department, 2018, p. 8). At 7:23pm, all officers were instructed to don their riot helmets. At 7:30pm, one of our observers saw a group of four officers, one of whom was carrying an orange "less lethal" shotgun, use the LRAD to repeat their warning as they walked along Monroe St. between 2nd and 3rd. As these announcements were being made, one of our observers at 3rd and Monroe heard a crowd member respond by shouting "then maybe don't escalate by wearing riot gear!" Just after that announcement, one of our observers noted that "the tone of the protest changed" and that the crowd had become "more vocally anti-police." Another observer's field notes stated that after these announcements, tempers among crowd members began to "kick up." At 7:42pm, a PPD after-action report indicates that protesters began directing chants toward officers (Phoenix Police Department, 2018). This is consistent with our field notes, which indicate that at 7:43pm, our observers began hearing anti-police chants such as "fuck the police" and "hands up don't shoot" for the first time during this event. Our observers noted that these anti-police chants appeared to be coming from certain segments of the crowd, not the crowd as a whole.

As it began to get dark outside, some protesters began to vacate the area, leaving behind a younger population that appeared to shift its focus from the rally attendees toward the police.[5] At 7:58pm, one of our observers noted that more police were moving into position on Monroe Street between 2nd and 3rd and that they "appear to be gearing up for something." That same observer noted at 8:02pm that "the crowd has gotten a lot angrier." At 8:15pm, the PPD after action report notes that officers cleared a parking garage at 2nd and Monroe because water bottles were being

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[5] On August 22, 2017, civil twilight in Phoenix began at 7:06pm and ended at 7:31pm (www.timeanddate.com).

thrown down at officers from within the structure. At 8:17pm, one of our observers noted that

officers "had pulled their visors down and were standing at attention." He further noted that it

seemed like officers "knew something was going to happen, and were just waiting for it to kick

off." By 8:20pm, according to the PPD, antifascists had "raised two large signs and began to

conceal themselves behind the signs" (Phoenix Police Department, 2018, p. 9). Several members

of the group began opening bags and distributing materials, including gas masks, to the rest of

the group. The group then began to slowly shift forward up against the pedestrian barrier. Police

found their movements suspicious and ordered a helicopter to "fly over and provide intelligence"

on their activities (Phoenix Police Department, 2018, p. 9). A helicopter soon began circling and

shining a light on the group on Monroe between 2nd and 3rd Streets. At 8:25pm, President

Trump's rally ended with him declaring that we will "make America great again."

After the Rally [8:25-9:31pm]

Researchers on the north side of the Convention Center noted that a group of anti-fascist

(Antifa) protesters had slowly grown in size throughout the event. Many of them were dressed in

all black and covered their faces with black balaclavas or bandanas. Some of them were wearing

or carrying items containing anti-fascism messages and insignia. The group appeared to be

initiating many of the chants and shouts directed towards the police. Though some protesters had

left once it got dark and President Trump's speech had ended, the anti-fascists began to assemble

near the pedestrian fence on Monroe Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets. At 8:30pm, one of our

observers saw protesters on Monroe between 2nd and 3rd Streets throwing water bottles at police.

Three members of the research team positioned themselves around the anti-fascist group to

observe their behaviors, including their interactions with the police. Footage from a Convention

Center security camera showed several anti-fascist protesters attempting to push down the

pedestrian barrier between the sidewalk and the northern side of Monroe. In response, without

first providing any verbal warning, police began deploying PepperBall® rounds at protesters at

approximately 8:32pm.[6]

The PPD after action report notes that after the initial volley of less lethal munitions fired

by police, "the frequency of items being thrown at officers rapidly increased" (p. 9). At 8:34pm,

someone in the crowd threw a smoke or gas canister toward police. PPD officers then deployed

smoke canisters toward the anti-fascists in the crowd "to defuse the situation," but people in the

crowd threw or kicked them back toward police. PPD officers then deployed additional

PepperBalls® as well as other less lethal weapons, including CS gas ("tear gas"), flash bang

grenades, and various types of munitions. Though police claimed to fire PepperBall® rounds at

the ground in front of the anti-fascists breaching the barricades, the rounds struck and injured

numerous others who had committed no crime, including the first author. At 8:43pm, after the

first author had been struck by two different types of impact munitions, and three members of the

research team had been exposed to tear gas, we chose to end the observations due to safety

concerns. Our analysis of events after that is based on the copious video footage and timelines of

events issued by police and conventional media sources, as well as by individuals posting on

various social media channels.

After the police deployment of tear gas and various munitions, much of the crowd

dispersed. Video footage reveals that leaders of the anti-fascist group rallied their members

together. Many of them retaliated by throwing tear gas and smoke canisters back at police and

also throwing water bottles, rocks, and fireworks at police. The police then returned fire with

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[6] PepperBall® rounds are less lethal munitions used by police, typically for crowd control purposes. They are similar to paintball rounds, but they contain a chemical irritant intended to cause discomfort to the eyes, nose, and throat of those exposed to it.

more tear gas and projectiles, and began using flash bang grenades.[7] As the conflict unfolded,

protesters who did not appear to be affiliated with the antifascists joined in on chants criticizing

the police. Protesters yelled at police angrily with statements like, "fuck you," "who's inciting

now" and "you are the insurgents!" While many protesters fled, others remained near the

intersection of 2nd and Monroe. Protesters threw objects at police, and police deployed chemical

agents and less-lethal munitions at protesters. The PPD eventually began issuing audible

warnings to disperse at approximately 8:52pm, about twenty minutes after first deploying less

lethal munitions at the crowd. The back and forth conflict between police and protesters

continued until approximately 9:31pm, at which time the PPD had largely finished dispersing the

protesters. After police had finished dispersing protesters, body-worn video footage captured one

officer saying "I thought we did a pretty good job kicking their ass" and then laughing about it.[8]

The next day, Chief Jeri Williams gave her officers "an A-plus" for their performance during the

protest (KTAR News, 2017).

Issues of Significance

Our chronology of events suggests that conflict between police and protesters at this

event represented a mutual escalation process through which actions by each group, whether

intentionally or unintentionally, triggered reactions from the other group. It is clear that a small

group of anti-fascist protesters threw plastic water bottles toward rally attendees, after which

police responded by having officers issue repeated announcements warning protesters not to

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[7] Flash bang grenades, also known as noise flash diversionary devices, are less-lethal explosive devices that emit a loud sound and a bright flash of light. They are typically used by police and military personnel to stun or distract people during tactical operations.
[8] While we cannot generalize about all officers' perspectives from this one comment, it is not unreasonable to question whether some officers may have embraced a warrior mentality rather than a guardian mentality in responding to the protest. For further reading on the difference between guardian and warrior mentalities in policing, see Rahr and Rice (2015).

throw objects at police. Police incident reports and field notes from our observers both suggest that these announcements led the crowd to become more agitated. The anti-fascists then began pushing into the barricades set up on the north side of Monroe, at which point the police began deploying PepperBalls® at the people breaching the barricade. At this point, the police had not issued any warning to disperse, and most people in the crowd did not have the vantage point to observe the behaviors of the anti-fascists. In the absence of any communication from police, people in the crowd were palpably shocked and angered at what they viewed as an unwarranted escalation on the part of the police. At that point, crowd members began throwing additional objects at police, including water bottles and a canister that emitted some type of smoke or gas. Police responded by deploying inert smoke canisters toward protesters. Protesters continued throwing objects at police, including the smoke canisters that police had thrown at them. Police then initiated a massive escalation in use of force against the entire crowd, deploying tear gas, foam baton rounds, PepperBalls®, and flash bang grenades. Hundreds, if not thousands of people who had not committed any crime or been ordered to disperse were forced to breathe tear gas and many were struck and injured by projectiles fired by police.

Analysis

Based on our coding of the interview data, we identified seven clear themes associated with protesters' experiences during the Trump rally. These themes can be categorized into three temporal segments. The first two themes involve protesters' feelings and attitudes upon arrival at the protest. The second two themes involve dynamics that occurred during the protest before the police use of force against the crowd. The final three themes involve dynamics that occurred

during and after the police use of force against the crowd. Table 1 shows the three temporal segments and seven themes that emerged from our analysis.

—INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE—

Theme 1: Initial Attitudes and Feelings in General

Two themes emerged that were associated with people's attitudes and feelings upon arrival at the protest. The first focused on people's general attitudes and feelings. Several participants described feeling hopeful when they first arrived. For example, one respondent said, "I was very, very hopeful towards this idea of peace and social progression. And the interactions I had were just like beautiful. It was so positive at the beginning…" [#2]. Another said, "I think hopeful, excited, yes hopeful and excited. Getting being a part of something bigger than yourself" [#3]. Another respondent said: "When I first got there, I was hopeful.…the start of it was really actually calm and happy. Lots of people were smiling and making jokes and discussing things…." [#5]. Others described a feeling of excitement upon arrival at the protest. For example, one respondent said, "when we finally got there, there were so many other people, which was exciting to see how many people were protesting" [#8]. Another said, "I was excited to see what was going to go on. I was curious how this was going to go" [#9]. Another said, "I was feeling excited, to be with people who were enthusiastic on the basis of their faith to stand up for the rights of vulnerable populations… so that felt exciting, empowering" [#10]. One protester was excited to connect with other like-minded people at the protest:

> "…it was just kind of refreshing for me because it felt like the same thing, like they wanted to find other people, other connections, other people to connect with over the issues they felt outraged about..." [#7]

Overall, our analysis reveals that when protesters arrived at the event, they were generally in good spirits. They describe feeling hopeful and excited to be able to participate in the protest.

Theme 2: Initial Attitudes and Feelings Toward Police

We also asked protesters how they thought about police at the rally at the beginning of the protest. Most expressed neutral or positive views of police when they first arrived. For example, one respondent said, "I was actually thanking some of them at first who were seeming to be fairly positive" [#2]. Another said, "It was a very low-key environment. The police never seemed agitated at the beginning and it was all good there" [#3]. Another respondent explained that while the sun was up, protesters were aware of the police "but they were a non-issue at that point" [#4]. One respondent noted that prior to the use of force against the crowd, the police "were a pretty good model of restraint. I didn't see anything up until the tear gas happened, but up until that moment I don't recall witnessing a single moment of anything that could be called brutality" [#7]. Several others echoed similar sentiments, noting that prior to the use of force, the police were "respectful and objective" [#8], "amazing" [#9], and "keeping us safe" [#10].

Not all of the feedback about the police prior to the use of force was positive. For example, one respondent distinguished between officers wearing regular uniforms and those wearing riot gear.

> There were some who were in less gear and their gear and demeanor was more casual and they were kind of simply walking around patrolling the area making sure everything was okay, and my experience in the interaction between protesters and those kinds of cops were very peaceful… I saw some laughing and joking… but there were the cops who were more heavily geared and stood as a physical barrier between the protesters and the

space that the rally was being held. There was, I guess, no interaction but that they were

just standing there as a physical barrier with a kind of stoic demeanor. And yeah there

was like almost no reaction but still I guess just the body language was more intense and

I think people definitely sensed that. [#2]

Other respondents expressed a perception that police may have been biased against the

protesters, but not against the Trump supporters. For example, one respondent said: "I got the

feeling that the police were there maybe more for Trump supporters' protection than the general

well-being of the public" [#4]. Another said, "all of the tension felt like it was between the police

and the protestors" [#5]. Another recalled an instance in which police were intervening between

protesters and Trump supporters. The officers were facing the protesters and had their backs

turned to the Trump supporters as if they were not "worried about them at all" [#7].

Our analysis of the interview data reveals that when protesters arrived, they did not

appear to be angry or frustrated with the police. Many interviewees expressed neutral or positive

comments about police at the start of the rally, with some expressing gratitude for police actions.

Some noted that certain officers seemed to have a stoic or impersonal demeanor, particularly

those officers wearing tactical gear. Others observed what they viewed as a bias toward Trump

supporters and against protesters. None of the protesters we interviewed described showing up at

the event with an anti-police sentiment, including one who admitted being associated with the

anti-fascist movement.

Theme 3: Crowd Heterogeneity

Two themes emerged that were associated with dynamics that occurred during the protest

before the police use of force against the crowd. The first one has to do with crowd

heterogeneity. There is a common tendency for people unfamiliar with research on crowd psychology, including police officers, to view crowds as monolithic. This perspective leads police to treat crowds as a "homogeneous whole," an approach that often escalates tension and conflict (Stott & Reicher, 1998a, p. 509). However, a common finding in the crowd psychology literature is that crowds are typically heterogeneous (e.g., Reicher, 1984; Drury & Reicher, 2009; Stott & Reicher, 1998a). Even though we did not ask about this issue during the interviews, several respondents raised it on their own when discussing their experience at the protest. For instance, one protester noted that portions of the crowd appeared younger and angrier, while other portions included "elderly people and ministers and priests and religious leaders who were demonstrating peacefully. So, there was definitely an angry side and a more peaceful side. I mean you could feel it" [#1]. Another protester said that it felt like "more of a community gathering than a protest. There were children and elderly people, some of my professors were present, colleagues, families…" [#2]. Another protester noted that the crowd contained "all the disparate elements of the liberal left" who came to the protest to "find other people, other connections, other people to connect with over the issues they felt outraged about" [#7]. One protester noted that people at the protest appeared to focus on different issues:

> I saw people with signs about education, and I know there were some people who were focusing on issues like immigration, there was a lot of that. I think there were some people representing Black Lives Matter. I think there was sort of a lot of people protesting different aspects of the package he [Donald Trump] was selling. [#8]

Finally, one protester [#9] acknowledged that the protest included people with different levels of privilege. He noted that he and his peers are mostly upper middle class, and "they don't ever

worry about where their next meal is going to come from." However, when they arrived at the protest, they saw people "who were obviously there because, you could even see in their eyes, they had been affected badly by this." We will return to the issue of crowd heterogeneity in the Discussion section.

Theme 4: Escalating Tensions

We asked interviewees to describe anything they may have observed at the event that appeared to escalate tensions between police and protesters prior to the police using force. While some protesters did observe such factors, most, as noted in Theme 5, were taken completely by surprise. One protester, who had significant experience in attending protests and serving in a de-escalation role, noticed police donning riot gear as the Trump rally was ending:

> It was as the Trump supporters and people were exiting the building. I remember being
> on the corner across the street from the convention center and I told a few people in my
> area, you know, police are standing there with shields and full riot gear standing at
> attention facing us, about ten of them. I told everyone in our area that means they are
> probably getting ready to do something. They are probably going to tear gas the crowd to
> get everyone to disperse, so everybody who has something to cover your face with, cover
> your face. [#5]

Another protester also saw the police gearing up as the rally was ending: "towards the end their gear got heavier which heightened my sense of fear" [#2]. She explained that she was fearful because of how "protests and rallies often go in America and knowing the possibility of police brutality on peaceful protesters." One protester observed an escalation of tension within a subset of the crowd. "It felt like there was some tension and I couldn't quite place it, but it just felt like

there was some kind of electricity in the air, but the crowd was not all benevolent…. I was seeing

a lot of signs said like, you know, the F-word and just, that were not about being loving and kind

and good to your neighbor. You know; a lot of the nice signs that I'd seen earlier. There was

more antagonism towards the president and his supporters" [#11].

Theme 5: Surprise at Police Use of Force

        One of the most common themes that arose during the interviews was the level of

surprise or shock that people experienced when the police began to use force against the crowd.

Moreover, these responses arose organically since we did not ask questions intended to focus on

this issue. People expressed surprise or shock because the crowd behavior during the event did

not appear to warrant such a response, and police did not issue any warnings prior to using force.

For example, according to one protester, "at the beginning, the tear gassing was a shock.

Absolute shock… it took me a minute to realize what was even happening" [#2]. Another said

"the response, and the scope of the response, escalated so quickly from my perspective… it was

completely out of nowhere. I did not hear any warning" [#10]. Another protester had decided to

leave the event and had just started to walk home. It was at that point, she said, "when I

experienced the first round of tear gas or pepper spray. But there was no warning" [#4]. During

the interview, another protester snapped his fingers and said "it happened like that." He

explained that one minute, people were walking around protesting, and the next minute "the

police are spraying and people are running" [#9]. Finally, one protester said, "when we got

gassed, it came out of nowhere… from where we were standing, everything was so calm" [#6].

Theme 6: A Transfer of Grievance

Immediately following the police use of force, many protesters appear to have experienced "a transfer of grievance" (HMIC, 2009). As applied here, this term refers to the protesters shifting the focus of their grievance from the initial object of the protest (President Trump and his followers) to the police. Several protesters described having strong emotional reactions in the immediate aftermath of the police use of force, including anger, frustration, and fear. For example, one protester [#1] explained that she was angry at the police for using force against peaceful protesters and the public at large:

> I am not afraid. I am angry. Like, as angry as I can be… because they are attacking their citizens. And not only that but it was they have completely made downtown Phoenix inhospitable to people, not just protesters. But there's people shopping still because the Arizona Center was still open. People at the movie theater, umm it was ridiculous… I am walking through a cloud of tear gas, I am so furious. [#1]

Another protester explained: "the use of force by the Phoenix Police Department was absolutely criminal. It was not that it was simply unjustified. It was that it was absolutely criminal" [#2]. Another said "once they start unleashing the tear gas and pepper spray and whatever other weaponry they used on us, then it really pissed me off, like 'why, why are they doing this to us? We were all just here peacefully protesting'" [#4]. Finally, one protester who had positive views of the police prior to this experience, said "I guess I felt, I did kind of move from feeling like they're here to help us be safe to feeling like they overreacted… and then subsequently put a lot of people in danger that they were there to protect. And then didn't necessarily take a lot of

responsibility for it afterwards" [#11]. We will return to a discussion of psychological change and the transfer of grievance in the Discussion section.

Theme 7: Protecting Vulnerable People

While the transfer of grievance is a well-known phenomenon in the protest policing literature, we did not anticipate the final theme that emerged from our qualitative analysis. Most of the people we interviewed told us that when the police began using force against the crowd, their first thought was about helping vulnerable people in the crowd. This theme emerged organically; we did not ask respondents about it. Yet it was a common reaction expressed during our interviews. For example, one respondent was concerned about people trampling each other in their attempts to escape the area:

> There was no way to get out, there was just, you know, there were still children there, there are people in wheelchairs there, like it wasn't only for my safety or my friend's safety, but for everyone there. Just people couldn't move and what else are they trying to do, and people were in a panic, you know my fear was that people were going to trample each other trying to get away from the police. The barricades were still up, I know I tripped over one trying to get up 3rd Street just getting from the force of crowd just trying to get away. That was my fear, was that people, you know, in all of this confusion and chaos people were also going to unintentionally hurt each other and trample each other trying to get away. [#4]

Another respondent risked further exposure to tear gas to help people escape:

> The first thing was, I started running in and trying to make sure that people that I knew were out. I went in and started trying to drag some people out. Um, so I took off my shirt

and wrapped it around my face and did my best to hold my breath and go in and help one

or two people get out of there. [#6]

Another respondent was especially concerned about people with asthma having difficulty

breathing due to the tear gas:

As people were trampling over a barrier, I got my heel stuck in one… I had fear for me

but really, once I got out of that specific area in like a minute, I had more fear for

everyone else. I was watching people with asthma that I wasn't sure were going to make

it. And so, again, it was still in that… phase of helping others. [#9]

Another focused on helping someone in a wheelchair escape from the area:

There was a flashbang that went off as the tear gas canister went off and I was standing

next to a woman in a wheelchair and I remember seeing the smoke coming up and

coming in our direction and then I just grabbed her and started pulling her back away

from the crowd of people who were running away from the smoke" [#5].

Several respondents focused on helping to evacuate children from the area. For instance,

one said:

I had my children there, so my priorities were to make sure my children were with me as

people were stampeding out, and to keep them safe and get them away from danger. And

then young adults were with me as well, I was making sure that they were all in, that I

was in touch with all them… So that, my priority changed to taking care of people. It

became far, it was less about the purpose of the demonstration from that point." [#10]

Another respondent said:

It was really, really stressful and scary. I felt foolish for having brought my children to

that kind of demonstration where I thought it would be okay, but then there were sounds

and stuff in the air that we couldn't breathe and we didn't really know what was

happening. [#11]

Finally, another respondent, who was there as part of a church group, said, "[we had] my priest's

three kids… once it started to look ugly, I was mostly just focused on leaving with them so

they'd be alright" [#8].

Discussion

Based on a multi-method ethnographic approach, we examined crowd reactions to the

police use of force on protesters outside of a campaign-style rally held by President Donald

Trump in Phoenix. The rally occurred at a time of great political and social upheaval in the

United States. Only ten days earlier, a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia had

resulted in three deaths and dozens of non-fatal injuries. Despite the chaotic period during which

the protest was held, it remained largely peaceful for most of the day. Protesters and Trump

supporters heckled each other spiritedly, but with a few minor exceptions, the conflict remained

verbal, not physical, during the daylight hours. After dark, tensions between protesters and police

intensified, and conflict and violence ensued between the two groups. Although the vast majority

of the crowd was behaving in a peaceful and lawful manner, and had not been ordered to

disperse, police used a variety of less lethal weapons to disperse the crowd.

Our analysis of this protest consisted of three primary approaches. First, we carried out

direct observation of the protest by multiple observers situated in different places within the

crowd. Second, we reviewed hundreds of videos from a variety of sources, including protesters,

journalists, building security cameras, police body-worn video cameras, and others. Based on

these first two approaches, we constructed a consensual timeline of events. This timeline is

useful for understanding the flow of events, including the outbreak of conflict and violence

between protesters and police as well as its aftermath. Third, we interviewed people who

participated in the protest. Based on thematic analysis of qualitative data from those interviews,

we identified seven themes that we categorized into three temporal periods: (1) upon arrival at

the protest, (2) before the police use of force, and (3) during and after the police use of force.

Upon Arrival at the Protest

We identified two general themes associated with respondents' thoughts and feelings

upon arrival at the protest. First, they reported feeling hopeful and excited. They were opposed to

President Trump and his policies and they were eager to lend their voice to the protest occurring

outside of the rally. Second, they did not show up angry at the police. To the contrary, they

observed police behaving in a restrained and helpful manner in their interactions with protesters.

Some wondered whether the officers may have been more aligned with Trump supporters than

protesters, but overall their perspectives on the police were largely positive.

Before the Police Use of Force

We identified two general themes associated with respondents' thoughts and feelings

before the police use of force. First, respondents viewed the crowd as a heterogeneous collection

of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. It is common for people, including police officers,

to mischaracterize crowds as homogeneous (Reicher, 1984; Reicher et al., 2004; Stott & Reicher,

1998a). This is part of a more general pattern in social psychology in which ingroups view

outgroups as homogeneous, particularly when they perceive outgroups as threatening (Corneille

et al., 2001; Rothberger, 1997). Here, respondents made it clear that the crowd was

heterogeneous. Second, some respondents observed what they perceived as escalating tensions among both protesters and police prior to the police use of force. With regard to police, respondents focused in particular on what officers were wearing and carrying (many officers were wearing helmets with visors and some were carrying shotguns or launchers for deploying less-lethal projectiles). They also focused on officers' posture and demeanor, noting that officers became more "stoic" or "rigid" in the period leading up to the use of force. Theoretical accounts of crowd psychology and behavior focus heavily on police *actions* during crowd events, but to a much lesser extent on their visual appearance and other nonverbal cues. Much remains to be learned about the psychological effects of these cues on crowds. One recent analysis drew on communication accommodation theory in highlighting the role of these cues as forms of nonaccommodative intergroup communication that should be carefully calibrated to avoid unintended consequences (Maguire, in press).

During and After the Police Use of Force

We identified three general themes associated with respondents' thoughts and feelings during and after the police use of force. First, respondents expressed shock and surprise that the police would use force against a large crowd in which the vast majority of people were behaving lawfully and had not been ordered to disperse. From their perspective, they were engaging in peaceful First Amendment expression when they were assaulted, without provocation, by police. The shock and surprise emerged from the profound asymmetry in the perspectives of protesters and the police. Protesters viewed themselves as respectable citizens asserting their constitutionally protected speech and assembly rights, whereas police viewed them as dangerous, disorderly, and engaging in unlawful assembly. As noted by Reicher (1996, p. 128), conflict

arises in contexts in which "two groups hold incompatible and irreconcilable notions" about the propriety of their own and the other's behavior.

Second, consistent with the elaborated social identity model, the respondents appear to have experienced a shift in social identity when the police began using force against the entire crowd based on the disorderly and illegal conduct of a small number of protesters (Drury & Reicher, 2000). When respondents first arrived at the protest, their opinions about the PPD ranged from mildly negative to positive, and in some cases effusive. However, when the police began deploying less lethal weapons against them in the absence of an order to disperse, they experienced a "transfer of grievance" that involved shifting the focus of their protest from President Trump and his supporters toward the police (HMIC, 2009). A commonly observed finding in studies of crowd psychology and behavior is that when police impose a common fate on all crowd members by using force indiscriminately, the crowd tends to unite, often angrily, in opposition to the police (Reicher et al., 2004). Indiscriminate police tactics can set in motion a shift in social identities that results in a heterogeneous crowd uniting in opposition to illegitimate police action, thereby forming a more psychologically homogeneous crowd (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996). As noted by Stott et al. (2018, p. 846), this emergent sense of shared self-categorization empowers the crowd and provides it with a greater "capacity for coordinated collective action."

Third, almost all of the respondents explained that when the police began using force, their first thought was about protecting vulnerable people, including children, the elderly, and people with physical disabilities or illnesses. Several of them placed themselves in harm's way to help others escape from the indiscriminate force used by the police. Certain popular perspectives on crowds view those within them as prone to panicking and behaving in an irrational and selfish

manner during emergencies. Contrary to these perspectives, social science research has found

that crowd members often behave in an altruistic and even heroic manner during emergencies

(Cole et al., 2011; Drury et al., 2009b). The same intergroup dynamics that led respondents in

this study to experience a transfer of grievance may explain their altruistic inclinations to help

vulnerable people in the crowd. Drury et al. (2009a, p. 489) note that "through sharing a common

relationship to an antagonistic other, crowd members come to see themselves as one. This, in

turn, is the basis for solidarity, cohesion, and empowerment in the crowd." Our findings suggest

that when the police used indiscriminate force against a largely peaceful crowd, their actions

unified the crowd and set in motion both an oppositional response (a transfer of grievance) and

an altruistic response (helping vulnerable people).[9]

Implications

The findings presented here have implications for theory, research, and policy. With

regard to theory and research, the findings raise important questions about the factors that

promote altruistic and oppositional responses to illegitimate or illegal behavior by legal

authorities. For example, during racial justice protests following the death of George Floyd,

protesters in the United States engaged in a wide variety of prosocial and antisocial behaviors in

response to police actions. While there is a strong body of theory and research on the role of the

police in preventing or stimulating oppositional responses from crowd members during protest

events, much less is known about the factors that promote prosocial or altruistic responses during

these events (e.g., Drury et al., 2009a, 2009b; Reicher, 2004). Research on altruistic responses

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[9] An additional explanation for the altruistic response may be that people were primed to engage in helping behavior due to the sense of community that several respondents recalled feeling early in the protest. To the extent that people were already experiencing some sense of shared social identity prior to the police use of force, that shared identity may have become stronger and more salient when they experienced a direct threat to the physical and psychological wellbeing of the group as a whole.

during crowd events focuses primarily on disasters and mass emergencies (e.g., Cocking et al., 2009; Drury et al., 2009a,b; Drury, 2012). However, Drury and Winter (2003) hypothesize that a sense of shared identity among crowd members may provide them with a source of collective strength in mass emergencies and other types of crowd events, including protests. They argue that this collective strength empowers crowd members and promotes prosocial behaviors such as cooperation and coordination. Much remains to be learned about the situational and psychological dynamics that promote altruistic behavior during protests and other types of crowd events beyond mass emergencies, particularly when outgroups like the police exercise their authority in an illegitimate and indiscriminate manner. One possibility emerging from this study is that the presence of people perceived to be vulnerable -- such as children, the physically disabled, the injured, and the elderly -- may promote altruistic helping behaviors. The presence of vulnerable people may also fuel more intense oppositional responses in the presence of police tactics that are perceived as indiscriminate and illegitimate.

With regard to policy, our findings provide a useful example of the difference between what sociolegal scholars refer to as the law in the books and the law in action (Pound, 1910). Peaceful protesters in the United States are ostensibly protected by the First Amendment's speech and assembly provisions, but the police response to protests sometimes threatens the expression of those rights. Reforming the way police handle protests (and crowds more generally) is crucial for understanding the reality of people's speech and assembly rights (Maguire, 2015; Maguire & Oakley, 2021). One way to do that is to develop evidence-informed policies, practices, and training that incorporates theories, concepts, and research evidence from the study of crowds. Scholars and police professional organizations have put forth numerous

evidence-informed proposals for reforming the police response to crowd events (e.g., HMIC, 2009; Maguire, 2022b; Maguire & Oakley, 2020; Reicher et al., 2004).

Limitations

Although this study has many strengths, it also has limitations that are important to acknowledge. First, while our observation team included five members, the protest was large and distributed across multiple city blocks. For that reason, it was not possible to observe all aspects of the protest. We did our best to spread out and observe as much as possible, but a larger team of observers would have enabled us to cover more ground. Second, our review of hundreds of videos from numerous sources was useful for filling in gaps in our direct observations, but video footage has inherent limitations for studying the emergence of conflict and violence in crowd events. Third, although the interviews with protesters were an effective and informative method for understanding people's thoughts and feelings during the event, a larger sample size and more rigorous sampling methods would have been preferable.

Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that when police used force against a large crowd in response to the behaviors of a small number of crowd members, they imposed a "shared fate" that appears to have unified the crowd (Drury et al., 2009a, p. 496). That emergent sense of crowd unity led respondents to join together in opposing what they viewed as illegitimate police actions. It also led them to adopt altruistic responses focused on helping vulnerable people, even though that meant placing themselves at risk. Our findings are useful for understanding psychological and behavioral reactions to the indiscriminate use of force by police against people engaged in peaceful and lawful protest activity. Our findings also raise important questions

about the efficacy and propriety of the police response to protests, particularly in a nation that

provides robust constitutional protections for people's speech and assembly rights.

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