RURAL POLICE OFFICERS AND THEIR ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF
PROTEST EVENTS

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ABSTRACT

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Decades of studies have explored police and protest events. Unfortunately, there are few studies that specifically explore rural police officers and their experiences working during a protest event. This thesis explores rural police officer’s experiences, attitudes and perceptions of protest events. Using grounded theory, I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with thirteen active police officers in a rural area in Northern California. Using the theory of reification, the results provide more insight into rural police culture, characteristics, and their perceptions of police and protest tactics and strategies during a protest.
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To my daughters, Adeline and Eleanor, who continuously reminded me there is a world outside of the lab and it needs to be explored.

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INTRODUCTION

During a class one day, I began to think about the United States police culture. I have been interested in the study of police because of my prior experiences and wanted to know more about how the police interact with the community they work for. I was listing ideas and I remembered a question I would ask myself years before, but could never answer: As a police officer, what would I do if I were assigned to a protest event? Theoretically, the police are supposed to protect communities, yet their role seems to change when they interact with protesters. During protests, the police are limiting protesters movement, sequestering them to a specific location, and detaining or arresting protesters. When specifically discussing rural police officers, who are usually members of the community, know the community, and regularly interact with the same people; what does that interaction look like during a protest event? Does the interaction change the police officer’s perspective on protesting or a social issue?

To gain a better understanding of these interactions, I interviewed thirteen police officers, from different agencies in a rural, coastal region of Northern California. Using grounded theory, a qualitative methodology where theoretical understanding is developed from the data (Charmaz 2006), I explored their attitudes and perceptions of protesting, protests, and their duty as a police officer.

To explain the patterns and themes from the interviews, I used the theory of reification as a framework. To put it simply, reification is the objectification and commodification of the self while ignoring other realities and not applying a moral
compass (Berger and Pullberg 1965; Pitkin 1987; Thomason 1982). The reification of the police is an issue as the economy and the government influences their perceptions of reality. They objectify themselves as a commodity and objectify the protester as an obstacle within their police duties. The police officer forgets and changes their role as a community member and instead supports the government.

Before I discuss the results, I will first provide a summary of prior studies that have explored protest events, social movements, and social issues. I will also include police interactions with protesters, police culture and protest tactics. Because the thesis is focusing on rural police officers, I will discuss their culture and duties, and address there are few studies that focus on rural policing and even fewer qualitative police studies.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To encapsulate the police and protest issues, I will explain the purpose of protesting, the police, and rural policing. Explaining the purpose of protesting will provide the groundwork for exploring the police’s perceptions of protests, and why they utilize certain tactics when interacting with protesters. Because the thesis focuses on rural police officers, I will also explain rural policing. This includes the differences between rural and urban policing, perceptions of rural policing and the police officer, and the need for more research regarding rural policing, the police identity, and their interactions with protesters. Understanding these concepts will help to support the analysis and the theory of reification.

The Purpose of Protesting

In order to understand the relationship between the police and protesters, it is important to know why people protest and the protest tactics they use. As people lose legitimacy with their government, they assert their rights to demand change, while gaining some efficacy. People, as a collective, use defiant methods to address their grievances instead of pluralistic methods, such as communicating with their official government representative (Piven and Cloward 1979).

Some of these defiant methods take place as a protest event. A protest event is a public gathering of two or more people who attempt to inform a target audience using one or more types of protest tactics (della Porta and Fillieule 2004; Earl, Soule, and
Characteristics of protesters

Protesters can be from any socioeconomic class, ethnicity, gender, or other identity. In general, they protest because they believe they have been treated unfairly by the State or another entity, have been discriminated against because of their identity, there is a drastic change in culture, or because they are in support of a social issue, but not directly effected by it (Blumberg 2012). Even though many people are passionate about social issues, not all people have the ability to protest. This is known as biographical availability, where people have differing abilities to engage in protest. Some people are unable to protest because of financial and social responsibilities, such as employment or family responsibilities (Beyerlien and Hipp 2006; McAdam 2009). Another reason people do not protest is because they do not want to be labeled as a deviant by their community or peers (Beyerlien and Hipp 2006). Police officers may be biographically unavailable, because of certain defiant acts performed during a protest event. The following section will discuss the types of protest acts.

Protest acts

As the police interact with protesters during a protest event, the protesters will use defiant tactics to gain attention of the government (McBay 2011). Understanding protest acts is important as I explain the police’s perceptions of the acts, especially non-violent acts that purposely, but temporarily, hinder the daily lives of others. In order to
understand how the police might define and interpret protest acts, the readers should also have a basic understanding of what protest tactics are as well. Protest acts are either non-violent or violent, and either type can be socially and economically risky, as well as physically dangerous (Foreman and Haywood 1993; McBay 2011; Meyer 2004).

Non-violent actions

Non-violent protests are constituted by acts that do not require physically harming another person (Epstein 1991; McBay 2011). Civil disobedience is a non-violent form of protesting, which is more confrontational and resistive to State action (Epstein 1991; Rawls 2002). Property damage could be also considered non-violent; however there appears to be disagreement among the State and some scholars as to whether all property damage should be deemed non-violent (Bevington 2009; Foreman 1993; McBay 2011). A democratic government, such as the United States, which in theory provides formal avenues for social and political grievances, would rather have peaceful protest acts or use pluralistic methods, such as voting or contacting their political representative (Hirst 2000).

The use of violence as a protest act is problematic because the act sends a message, but the message is usually negatively received. Violent protest acts are used to purposely hurt another person or group as a retaliatory act or to address a grievance (Myers 2010; Bayley 1998; Gelderloos 2007; Hall 2010; McBay 2011). Many scholars recognize the importance of violent actions as a means to gain public attention, especially since the media is more likely to provide coverage of violent acts than non-violent acts (Gelderloos 2007; McBay 2011; Piven and Cloward 1979). Violent acts, however, create
a gray area between what is categorized as a protest event and what is characterized as an act of terrorism (McBay 2011).

Scholars argue the government primarily uses violent acts during protest events (Genderloos 2005; McBay 2011; Piven and Cloward 1979). The government maintains its power and economic system by allowing the police to use violence to quell dissent, although the protesters could be non-violent (Epstein 1991; Gelderloss 2007; Piven and Cloward 1979).

Police

Understanding why people protest, and the tactics they utilize are important as I address the police’s perceptions of protest and the protesters. To appreciate their perspectives, we should also understand the police’s insular, stoic culture and their legitimacy within the community. Police legitimacy is maintained by their actions (Ellison and Martin 2000; Gillham and Marx 2000; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2007; Waddington 2008; Mason 2010). If the police are a repressive tool of the government, by which I mean they are used to oppress citizens and limit their rights and freedoms for the benefit of the government, they lose legitimacy by the people. I will also discuss police protest tactics used and the development of the militarized police force. The loss of legitimacy by the people and the increase in police militarization, reifies police identity and their duty to the community. Additionally, I will discuss rural police officers, as compared to urban police officers and their differing perceptions of their duties. A rural
police officer lives in the same community where they work and they interact with the same people on and off duty. Despite this, their role seems to change as they interact with protesters.

Police protest history

Over time, the duties of the police have been developed to protect the dominant groups and the elite (Bernstein et al. 1977; Johnson 1981; Neocleous 2000). Within the history of the United States, sanctioned violence by the police has been used on the politically weak and the poor more than wealthy protesters (Earl and Soule 2006). During the 1820’s and 30’s, the police would attempt to stop rioting only once rioters were attacking the elite class (Bernstein et al. 1977; Johnson 1981). When rioters targeted African-Americans or non-Christians citizens, police would rarely intervene (Bernstein et al. 1977; Johnson 1981). Similar acts would also be witnessed during labor riots in the 1920’s and 30’s (Piven and Cloward 1979), civil rights protests in the 1950’s and 60’s (Bernstein et al. 1977; HoSang et al. 2012), and within the past few decades during environmental movements (Bevington 2009; Epstein 1992). Understanding the roots of protest policing provides some clarity about their current function as a government apparatus, as well as understanding how part of their identity and cultural has developed overtime.

Police culture

The police are a de-centralized institution, which means police departments act independently from each other (Misis 2012; Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000). Yet, the
United States police are generalized as aggressive, stoic, insular crime-fighters, who have a strong belief in esprit de corps. They will protect other police officers more than they would protect the public (Herbert 1996; Mason 2010; Misis 2012; Paoline et al. 2000). This generalization is problematic as the insular identity of police creates a form of the generalized other of the public.¹ Police agencies and officers, for example, will profile certain identities, (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011) which in turn can cause a relational disconnect between them and the public. This disparity can be observed among racial minority groups who are known to have more negative interactions with the police than other racialized and ethnic groups (Bayley 1998; Blackhurst 2013; Kirk and Matsuda 2011; Payne, Berg, and Sun 2005).

This is an issue with police officers, as the community does not perceive that the police care about community issues, especially in poor and non-white communities (Kirk and Matsuda 2011). Instead of finding common ground to protect the community and reduce crime, the police have created a culture of fear. Citizens are reluctant to seek police assistance because of the police’s uncaring and abuse behavior. The relationship can further deteriorate during protest events, especially when the police use violence against citizens. Examples of this have been continuously proven during the Civil Rights Movement and currently through the United States.

¹ According to Turner (2001), the generalized other is defined as a group or person having a certain perception(s) of another group and which are characterized as being different. Just add this to your paragraph.
Police legitimacy

To have legitimacy is to have power and vice versa.\(^2\) The police’s legitimacy with the public is lost as they fail to have similar goals and develop negative or callous attitudes toward community issues (Jackson, et al. 2013; Morris 2011). The police develop an “us vs. them” mentality because the social disconnect and alternative and narrow reality they create. By not acknowledging, accepting, making reparations, and reforming the police culture, they maintain this reified reality; especially toward community members who are continuously being directly discriminated and violently oppressed by the government (Jackson, et al. 2013; Morris 2011). Even if the police attempt to reform their repressive and detached culture it will take time. As Fillieule and Jobard (1998: 84) point out, the police cannot, “strike [sic] citizens while going to great lengths to assert that they are not enemies.” In order to develop and maintain legitimacy by the people, the police must create a balancing act of being tool of the government while being protectorates of the community with shared interests (Ellison and Martin 2000; Gillham and Marx 2000; Mason 2010; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2007; Waddington 2008).

Internal police legitimacy

The police are confronted by their own legitimacy as well. Most police want citizens to address their grievances through the proper channels, such as a petition, or

\(^2\) I will use Hannah Arendt’s definition of power. Habermas (1977:5), who critiqued Hannah Arendt’s perception of communication and power, provides Arendt’s definition of power, “…as the capacity of a social system to mobilize resources to attain collective goals.”
contacting a representative. If people protest, most police would rather have people limit themselves to non-violent, self-sequestering tactics that require little social and physical risk (Brenner and Ness 2009; McBay 2012; Paoline 2000); although there a minority of police officers who may empathize, support, and possibly participate in civil disobedience (Goodman and Semple 2015).

Even so, the police’s actions during a protest event are influenced by their duty to protect people, property, defend themselves, (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011; Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003; Vitale 2007) or by political considerations and conditions (Fillieule, O and Jobard 1998; Fichtelberg 2012). If the State supports brutal and illegal police protest tactics, some officers perceive these actions as a contradiction to their purpose to protect and service the public (Herbert 1996; Nadelmann 1993). Unfortunately, these oppositional voices have been marginalized within police organizations (Fakhro and Kleiner 1999; Schaible and Gecas 2010). Rather than making reforms and using alternative methods other than the use of violent, the police culture maintains an “us vs. them” mentality as they dismiss or deny police critics and reformers.

Police militarization

The militarized police protest method and the use of brute force and dominate control during protest events have increased since 9/11 (della Porta and Fillieule 2004). Homeland Security agencies and the U.S. Department of Defense has provided training and equipment to rural and urban police departments under the cover of national security (Nadelmann 1993). Some police departments, including rural departments, transformed into paramilitary agencies as they increased the use of military style formations,
equipment, adopted a rigid hierarchical command structure (Fernandez 2008; Kraska and Kappeler 1997; Pieterse 2004; Singer 2001; Vitale 2007), and recruited former military members as police officers (Bernstein et al. 1977; Johnson 1981; Johnston 1992; Singer 1990). A militarized police force has been a concern for some police officers (Nadelmann 1993), because of the violent acts against citizens. Yet, the police culture has accepted violent and aggressive acts against citizens more so than community building and taking a supportive role (Kraska and Kappeler 1997; Pieterse 2004; Singer 2001; Vitale 2007).

**Police protest tactics**

The taxonomy of police protest tactics can become very complex and expansive. In general, there are tough and soft tactics (della Porta and Reiter 1998). A tough approach is using brutal, repressive, and sometimes illegal acts and a soft approach is characterized by tolerant, flexible, and always legal (della Porta and Reiter 1998). Violent tactics seem to be used more than softer tactics, as this development has been influenced by the State, and overtime has been accepted as normal behavior within the police culture (Burris 1988).

Scholars discuss many types of police protest strategies during protest events. Police strategies commonly develop in a linear method during a protest event (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003). First, it is common for the police to not be a presence at a protest event (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003). The police have little reason to be at a protest event if the protesters are not violating laws. If the police are present, they will usually start as a soft presence, purposely not engaging the protesters while gathering intelligence (Earl et al. 2003; della Porta and Fillieule (2004). As more protesters
participate in the event, the police will begin to engage protests (Rafail, Soule, and McCarthy 2012).

Scholars also argue that the police should be peacemakers and not instigate violence (della Porta and Fillieule 2004; Fillieule and Jobard 1998). Using more communicative approaches, the police should be using mediation and formalized techniques to find solutions before violence is used (della Porta and Fillieule 2004). This type of interaction was observed during the initial phases of the Seattle WTO protests, but the police and protester relationship quickly deteriorated because of lack of communication and trust between the two groups (Gillham and Marx 2000).

This lack of trust has increased as the police have become more militarized over the past two decades (Brimo 2012). An example would be the use of the Miami model, which is a violent, suppressive police protest strategy (Fernandez 2008; Terwindt 2013; Vitale 2007). In 2004, the Miami police department trained for almost six months to prepare for a mass demonstration outside of the Republican National Convention (Fernandez 2008; Vitale 2007). The police were trained in military tactics and strategies including phalanx formations, mass arrests, and specialized non-lethal firearms. During the protest event, protesters, non-protesters, and journalists were arrested, many times without justification (Terwindt 2013).

The increase in violent and suppress acts is related to reification of the police. Police officers accept and utilize violent acts against protesters as normal behavior. Perceiving protesters as an enemy, the relationship is severed and diminished. It becomes
easier for the police to use violent acts, if they are trained and influenced to exclude others who do not fit their reality and understanding of society.

The purpose of the study was to learn more about rural police officers and how they interact with protesters. The concepts discussed in prior sections were from studies that focused on urban and metropolitan police departments. Even as the police culture is generalized and police training is standardized within each state, (Barrett, Haberfeld, and Walker 2009), rural and urban officers have different public expectations, duties, and stresses. This is significant to know as rural police officers may reify their role and duties within the community. Their reification could change how the public perceives them.

**Rural and urban differences**

The difference between rural and urban towns and counties is not just a matter of population size. Rural communities are very different from urban ones because of employment, crimes rates, and population demographics (Falcone Wells, and Weisheit 2002; Weisheit and Donnermeyer 2000; Yeager 2014). For example, rural communities in the U.S. are often populated with a white majority (Blackhurst 2013). Rural culture is also generally more insular and politically conservative, although the population in the location of this study leans politically liberal (McGhee and Krimm 2012; Weisheit and Donnermeyer 2000). The public and their perceived reality provide an alternate perception of the police as well.

**Public perception**

The public in rural towns and counties generally has higher positive perceptions of police officers than citizens in urban areas. Although younger rural citizens would be
the exception (Blackhurst 2013; Nofziger and Williams 2005). The public believes the police should be friendly and have a firm demeanor (Weisheit and Donnermeyer 2000; Payne, Berg, and Sun 2005; Yeager 2014). The reason is because police are members of the community in which they work and know many of the community members (Blackhurst 2013; Liederbach and Frank 2003). Yet, the public perceptions of police officers can cause some stress for officers, including the "fish-bowl" effect; the police can rarely ever be anonymous and must be aware of public perception while off-duty too (Oliver and Meier 2004).

Rural police agencies

Rural police departments are also different from urban police departments. Agencies generally have fewer resources and funding because of the smaller tax base, share resources with other local departments (Morton, Chen, and Morse 2008), and patrol larger areas with few officers (Morton, Chen, and Morse 2008; Oliver and Meier 2004; Weisheit and Donnermeyer 2000).

Rural police activities

Rural officers know their style of policing is different, especially police tactics and types of crimes (Barrett et al. 2009). The rural policing style is slower paced and more patience is necessary (Barrett et al. 2009). Rural police investigate fewer violent crimes and property crimes, i.e. burglaries and armed robbery (Oliver and Meier 2004), and, have more non-traditional police activities, i.e. livestock issues or neighbor/family disputes (Blackhurst 2013; Liederbach and Frank 2003; Taylor and Lawton 2012).
Lack of research on rural police officers

Rural policing studies were challenging to research. I was unable to find similar prior studies on rural police officers attitudes and perceptions of protest events. The majority of studies that discussed rural policing, also included that most policing research is conducted in urban areas. Scholars discussed the need for more research regarding the rural police officer’s identity, culture, and their engagement with the public (Barrett et al. 2009; Bartol et al. 1992; Blackhurst 2013; Gächter et al. 2013; McCoy and Aamodt 2009; Misis 2012; Nofziger & Williams 2005; Schaible and Gecas 2010), which includes a lack of studies on rural police since 9/11 (Yeager 2014). As noted above, the police have become more militarized and violent, research should be focusing on rural police officers and agencies to fill this gap.

I hope to illuminate the perceptions, characteristics, and duties of rural police officers. Rural police officers are members of a homogeneous community, and their firm, but fair attitudes reflect how they engage the public. Yet the overall police culture is leaning towards militarization, and police officers embrace a stoic, insular culture. How does this affect the rural police officer? I will begin to fill this gap within the literature with the results of this study.
METHODS

There were two purposes of this study. I wanted to examine police officers and their interactions with protesters and to have a better understanding of their thoughts regarding protesting and protests. To explore these purposes, grounded theory was used to construct questions, engage the participants, and analyze the data (Charmaz 2006). Additionally, the police culture can be retaliatory and exclusionary, so a goal during the interviews was to insure confidentiality and allow participants to freely express themselves. Thus, foster a deeper and intimate conversation as they discuss their experiences during protest events. I also hope the participants continue to explore their own thoughts and perceptions of protesters and the act of protesting after the interview.

The study used grounded theory with qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti to analyze the data. According to Charmaz (2006:10) grounded theory is a flexible, complementary method used to construct our, “involvement and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices.” Grounded theory also provides, for the purpose of this thesis, a means to gain a better understanding of the police and protesting from the police officer’s perspective. Instead of using pre-determined theoretical framework(s), grounded theory allows for the participant’s statements to provide themes. Using in-depth interviewing, grounded theory enables the researcher to uncover the participants’ descriptions and reflections on their experiences. Furthermore, the interviewer can respond with probing questions, which allows for deep, focused conversations.
Using a semi-standardized interview method, I asked 25 semi-structured questions, including follow up questions. Each interview was audio recorded and the participant choose the location of the interview. The shortest interview was 45 minutes and the longest was 80 minutes. I transcribed, analyzed, and coded each interview, and identified multiple themes, which will be discussed later in the results chapter.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Although confidentiality and anonymity is important in all research, the consequences for police officers in discussing internal police issues can be severe. As noted before, police culture is insular and officers and the agency will retaliate against other officers who whistle blow (Fakhro and Kleiner 1999; Strader 2009). The police are generally skeptical of interviews, especially from the media. The media is known to use statements out of contexts, shedding a negative perception without the police officer knowing, and not keeping the officer anonymous (Bellew 2001; Mason 2010). This is why I believe gaining trust and confidence from the participants from the beginning was important.

Researcher’s Bias

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3 According to Berg & Lune (2012:110), a semi-standardized interview is when the questions are planned, but, “the actual flow of the conversation will vary considerably according to the responses of each informant.”
From a student’s perspective, qualitative methodology is challenging because the researcher is learning to control a personal bias. I discuss bias because qualitative research is very subjective, and if the researcher does not acknowledge their bias toward a group or topic of study, it can severely warp the analysis and results of the study. This is important to know because the study is usually based on the researcher’s personal experience or opinion. They may already have developed a bias about the topic.

It is important for the researcher to know, understand, and control their bias. Therefore, I highly recommend taking more time during the planning stages of the research to control a bias. The realization of a bias will be easier to handle in the later stages of the process.

Selection Method

I invited police officers to be interviewed using direct email and a sampling method called snowball sampling.4 An email invitation was sent to possible participants, except for police officers who held administrative roles, from five different agencies in the research location. To find possible participants, I accessed public email addresses posted on police department’s website. I also attempted to find additional participants during the interviews, although I stopped asked after the first few interviews. None of the

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4 According Berg & Lune (2012:52), a snowball sample is a nonprobability sampling strategy, through which the researchers finds possible participants with certain attributes, interviews them, and then asks the participants if they know of other possible participants who may have the same attributes. Snowball sampling is used if the researcher is, “interested in studying various classes of deviance, sensitive topics, or difficult-to-reach populations,” such as police officers.
participants provided a name, so there was little justification to ask the question during later interviews.

Participant Requirements

The participant’s were required to have served least one year in a patrol division, worked at a protest event, and was working as a law enforcement officer at the time of the interview. The participants were asked before the interview if they fit the minimum requirements. Of the fourteen participants who accepted the interview only one could not fulfill the requirements.

There were a few reasons for the specific requirements. I did not want to interview new police officers. They usually have little police experience and would probably not have any experience working in a protest event. I also wanted officers who worked in a protest event because I wanted to know about their experiences during the events. I also wanted to interview active police officers to limit any complications later if the participant falsified their role as a police officer. Plus active police officers were easier to locate for interviews.

Participant Demographics
Quantitative data was not the primary focus of the study. Yet, the data is important to know to gain a general perception of the participants and a reference for future studies.

Of the thirteen participants, there were eleven men and two women, between the ages of twenty-eight and forty-nine years old. Their experience while on a patrol division ranged from six and a half years to fourteen years, and the longest serving officer was twenty-two years. As for the number of protest events they were assigned to it was difficult to count. Participants did not remember many of the protests they worked, I had to explain their experience during a public event was actually a protest event, and they may not have mentioned a protest event because they may not have realized the event was a protest during the interview.

Location

The study was conducted in a coastal rural region in Northern California. The definition of a rural area can be complex.\textsuperscript{5} Researchers who study rural communities commonly use the parameter of a city/town population of 50,000 people or less (Cromartie and Bucholtz 2008). This research will use the same definition, but will include counties outside of urban areas (US Department of Agriculture 2007).

\textsuperscript{5} According to the US Department of Agriculture (2015) there are nine definitions of rural depending on location, population size, and socioeconomic indicators.
Police agencies

There were four agencies associated with the participants. It should be noted the police agencies were not a focus of the study and the participants vocalized they were not representing their agency during the interview. Yet, their agencies internal politics, policies and procedures, and other variables were mentioned during each interview.

The development of the methodology was crucial in the results chapter. The breadth of experience as individuals as well as police officers was incredible. The participants not only discussed their experiences during protest events, but their relationship with other officers and their opinion of policing. Their experience provided the necessary data to develop patterns and themes. I believe if the participants were younger, inexperienced, and were no longer police officers, I would not have been provided the same quality of data.
RESULTS

This chapter will synthesize the data from interviews with rural police officers. The participant’s experiences provided multiple patterns and themes, which will be supported by prior studies and the theory of reification. I will explain that the police officers engage in reification as they commodify themselves and deny other people’s perceptions.

As the participants discussed their protest event experiences, they described their mental and physical reaction to the protester’s actions and their perceptions of protesters and protest tactics. To crystalize the overall negative and sometimes apathetic attitudes towards protesters and protesting the chapter is separated into three sections. The first section will discuss reification as a framework for the results. The second section will discuss the participant’s definitions and perceptions of protest tactics and events. This section will also explore their perceptions on public events and non-aggressive police protest tactics. The third section will discuss their characteristics as police officers. The section will focus on their understanding of common sense, their perceptions of the public and protesters, how they rationale or dismiss aggressive and sometime illegal police duties, and whether they would protest. Although I primarily focus on their perceptions of protesting and protesters, I include perceptions of the public because in rural communities many of the protesters are also part of the community. This unique interaction the police have with community is important, as I will continuously link their
experiences and opinions to reification. I will argue the participants are reifying themselves as they objectify the protesters to justify a specific and narrow reality.

Reification

The term reification is complex as it integrates multiple terms and concepts into a macro theory. Scholars define reification as a *forgetfulness* of human authorship (Berger and Pullberg 1965), ignoring a certain reality and taking their own reality for granted, (Thomason 1982; Pitkin 1987), but the concept is more than just a separation of reality. It is a loss of authenticity as people forget the internal and external reason for their labor. Their identity becomes a commodity as they alienate themselves, lose authenticity of their work, and accept their labor as a means to an end (Berger and Pullberg 1965; Pitkin 1987).

Ignoring a reality while separating work from consciousness, the person’s actions are redefined. Kant characterizes (Pitkin 1987: 278) reification as, “a failure to apply moral consideration in the [mental] treatment of people.” The alienation of labor is compounded by a lack of empathy toward others. The person accepts their own reality, and develops a rationale to deny other realities (Pitkin 1897). This issue is intensified as groups accept and rationalize group behavior. Especially groups whose labor and flow of production relies on the interaction with others, such as the police’s interaction with the public. If the police objectify a group and believe the group is inferior to them, the police can develop and rationalize stereotypes made against the group as well.
The police also forget their sense of agency and moral compass. They begin to believe they cannot change the process of their labor even if their actions could negatively affect other people. For example, the police may enforce questionable laws which they know would disrupt a community or groups within a community. Overtime, the police would accept the law as normal and never question it. They would continue to stereotype and arrest people who violate the law.

Overtime, as the group indirectly and directly accepts the actions the immoral actions become normalized within the collective. As new members join, they are assimilated into the culture. If the new member does not make an effort to change or support others who desire change, their attitudes and reactions are reified as they accept and approve of the current culture.

Definition and Perceptions of Protest Events

My goal was to gain a better understanding of the participant’s perceptions of protest. Most non-violent protesters know they are going to engage in a non-violent protest, and doing so they have an understanding of what non-violence protesting is and could probably provide a definition. As noted before, the police have different types of tactics to engage protesters, but usually use aggressive and sometimes violent acts. What would be their definition of a non-violent protest event? Their answers were not surprising, but other patterns developed which provided an interesting aspect to their perceptions.
Definition of a non-violent protest

Overall, the participants defined a non-violent protest as protesters who are self-sequestered and do not or limit their engagement with the public. Here is Sam explaining non-violent protesting,

My definition of a non-violent protest is when it doesn’t cause adverse actions to people that are not involved. You can stand online you can get your message out, there will be a [sic] reporter there who will talk to you and say why are you here, what are you trying to accomplish. You can get your message out and then at the end of the day you go home. To me that’s a non-violent protest.

In essence, the protester should be able to protest and have a message regarding a social issue. Once the public or the media receives the message the protest should stop. If the police must engage in the protest event, the protesters should insure they are not continuously causing a disruption in the participant’s duties and the public’s normal, daily activities. As Jacob states,

Whatever the protest was, I would meet them at their level. You know if it was about citizens about the Iraq War. I would probably just go to the veterans’ groups; I would go to, um, you know, VFW, which I’m a member of. Or something like that. And I can go talk to those people and that would be my approach. It doesn’t seem as, you know, as glorious going out there holding a sign. But really to be, uhh, the women in black or the um, what’s the other one,
“Veterans Against War,” no. Whatever the ones…Standing out on the, on there, who, who are they gonna reach with that?

The Women in Black, an anti-war, self-sequestering non-violent social movement, was used by three participants to support what a protest event should be. Some of the participants questioned that social movements method as well, noting that the public does not care, or want to listen to protesters.

Their reified identity develops from the pattern of their ignorance of protests and protesters. Some of the participants noted they had not considered what a non-violent protest was before the interview, or they rarely ever thought about their involvement in a protest event. The participants alienate themselves from their labor and lose agency as they develop a detachment from their experiences during a protest event. They accept the experience, but do not care enough to reflect why and how the protesters are protesting, whether they approve of it or not.

Non-aggressive police actions

As noted above, the police can use non-aggressive protest tactics. For the participants, those types of tactics were used when there were more protesters than police at a protest event. This is common among police agencies as the difference in the ratio will change police tactics even as the police have more tools and resources to use (Earl et al. 2003; Rafail et al. 2012; McCarthy et al. 2007). The participant’s noted that if they were obviously outnumbered, being aggressive and enforcing too many laws or certain
laws would be counter-productive. The participants may attempt to try alternative tactics to complete their duty, such as communicating with the protesters. Yet, many of the participants remarked communication could be unproductive as well. The protesters either will not listen or respond with yelling. Mark discussed using non-aggressive police tactics during a protest event,

If communication is not working and I can contain the problem, then it’s just containment. If they are going to be silly and upset, yelling and screaming and I can keep them in a bubble. I’ll let them yell and scream to their hearts content that usually takes more officers and being a softer presence. Cause running into try and yell and scream and turn it into a fight will never turn into anything good, ever. I tend to be patient.

Mark knew causing conflict would make the jobs harder, especially if there are more protesters than police. He also briefly discussed using communication to resolve the situation, but found it did not work. This pattern was observed throughout most of the interviews. Many of the participants believed communication works, but protesters do not want to listen, only want to response with yelling or instigating physical violence and property damage. His response supports the reified police identity, as the police believe they are the rational actor in the situation. They fail to realize the police’s lack of care or perceived negative perception of the protester could be a catalyst to creating the negative relationship.
Public events

What may be intriguing is the consideration that the same negative attitude is expressed when the participants discuss public events. The participants were assigned to events such as music festivals and sporting events. Lincoln discusses a sporting event where the fans would become aggressive,

You look at the LA riots, the same things happened. Um, our basketball games here. There’s a lot of people up there, and they can - for whatever reason <team name omitted> fans want to kill the coaches, or the, the refs all the time… they do. Like we have to escort the refs out, and they’re <the sport fan name omitted> like trying to grab them and stuff every time. And so we know that’s going to happen, and so we say, “Okay, we are going to deploy our officers up there when the refs have to go back to the locker room, and they run back to the locker room. We run with them all the way to the locker room and they go in there. Well, that’s one of the things we did to deescalate the situation because if they grab one of the refs we can only imagine the melee that would happen afterwards…

The planning may be similar to a protest event because the police may utilize the tools and strategies they know. What is interesting is the aggressiveness from the public is not fueled by passion of a social issue, but because of their enthusiasm, with the help of some alcohol.
Conversely, other participants discussed their experience during other larger public events differently. Some of the participants mentioned a music festival and the majority of the festival participants were under the influence of marijuana. Sam summarizes the event and the police action with the following,

I was involved with <music festival omitted>, the <location omitted>, down in <town omitted>, would have music concerts, we would go down there – Once again we are outnumbered, you know 3, 400 to 3 or 4. We would kind of hang out on the outside edges and if there ever was of a specific need we’d see, we’d take specific action at that point but really we were just there to prevent any body from getting hurt.

The police reacted to different situations by the collective behavior of the group. Whether the public was passionate about a sport or social issue, or were intoxicated, I found the overall police strategies and tactics did not dramatically change. The police would be a presence, but not engage the crowd unless they needed to. The participants would react only when a person engaged the police or other persons’ with violence.

The similar reactions and police tactics is linked to reification as the police objectify both groups. They also develop a sense of alienation and become morally bankrupt as they use the same aggressive and violent tactics uncaring of who the group is. Their identity is reified as they lose authenticity to care about the community as they do not care to know one group is attempting to bring attention to a social issue and the other is attempting to have fun at a sport game.
Whether the event is a protest or a public event, I acknowledge the participants want to complete their assigned task and move to the next task. This apathetic attitude and detachment is troublesome, especially when they interact with protesters. Rural police officers are part of the community they work in, and should know why people protest and what the community issues are. If the government is losing legitimacy by the people, and the people believe protesting is the appropriate action, the police should know the root causes of the protest. By knowing, they will be able to use the appropriate tools and resources to ensure the protesters are safe as well as themselves and bystanders who are not affiliated with the protest.

Even so, the police criticize the protester for protesting, even as the protesters attempt protest to fit within societal norms. It is hypocritical for the police to believe the best method to protest is to be self-sequestered and non-engaging, but then rarely consider what a non-violent protest is and its effects on the community. This is further compounded, as they believe alternative tactics do not work because the protesters are irrational persons. Especially, as they normalize violent and detached actions against the public they are suppose to protect.

Participant Characteristics

The participants discussed their duties, identity, and what is expected of them as police officers. Like their definitions and perceptions of protesting, their roles as rural police officers were not unique. The participants usually work alone, police assistance is
limited, but the officer should be firm, but fair with community members (Liederbach and Frank 2003). Grant, a male police officer of eight years, articulates the duty of a rural police officer,

> Cause some of those events, when you don’t have a lot of people with you. I mean, you know, as well as I do, what it’s like to work in remote areas and sometimes, you know what, taking a couple of step back is the best part of power.

Grant demonstrates the rural police officers do not always have police assistance, so the officer must also be patient, and take their time to make the right decision. Jacob discussed the tightly knit community of rural areas with,

> We’re fortunate that, uh, we have the same people working, I know, working the same area, on the same <location omitted>, so I can build a rapport with the people. I can go up and talk to them. When Occupy out on the - it go bigger here, then it got smaller, you know, fluxed.

Since rural communities are smaller and police officers usually live in the community, they interact with people they know prior to being a police officer. While on-duty they will also interact with the some of the same people who continue to violate the law. Lincoln, a 28 year old man with 5 years experience, discussed working the difference in rural and urban policing since he had worked in urban agency before,

> It’s a much different culture there, you know, you’re a number and if they’re close enough to see you then they read your name plate, but, you know, if
you’re going to a big event or a big call it’s all just ranks and names, no personal relationships.

His experience was that he was an anonymous officer in a large agency. The culture in his prior department developed a sense of alienation within the police community. If another police officer cared, they might read the nameplate, but normally the officer is another face in the crowd. Other officers who worked in urban department supported Lincoln’s perception.

Their perception of rural and urban policing is similar to prior research. It is difficult for the police officer to be anonymous in rural areas. They usually live in the community and sometimes the public either knew them before they were a police officer or currently knows them when they are not in a police uniform. Being in the public’s eye, they reify their identity to fit into the public’s perception of the police.

To justify this pattern, Charlie, a 47 year old man with 13 years of police experience, was discussing younger protesters with strong beliefs, he included an experience where he was arresting a person he met years before,

    Turns out he was one of those tree-sitters back in the day. Turns out we meet. So there was a lot of common ground talking about, he’s now in his early 30’s, with a lot more perspective, and he gets it now. He still wants to save the trees, but he knows that being cannon fodder is not the way to save the trees.
Charlie had experience being a member of social movements before becoming a police officer, but now has a different perspective on protesting. I asked him later in the interview if he uses his prior experience to build relationships with protesters during an event. He said he did not because he believed he would lose his authority with them. He purposely dismisses his prior experiences to develop a narrow reality of what a police officer should be, a key element of reification. He reifies his identity to support what a police officer should be in a rural community and purposely loses his ability to make social change by not using his experience as a prior member of a social movement. Furthermore, his considers younger protesters as naïve, believe protest leaders are using them, and then refer to them as cannon fodder. This pattern will be discussed later in the chapter.

Kent also discussed seeing a friend during an environmental protest he was assigned to and telling the person to leave before the police were to use physical force against the protesters. He knew the event would become more violent and wanted to protect the person. He has a moment of empathy for a person he knew, but reverted back to an identity that accepts aggression and violent acts as normal against a group of strangers.

Since they are members of the community they must act accordingly, but their actions during a protest does not change because they know someone. It is understandable they have a job, but the participants also discuss how their aggressive acts are acceptable. There is a fine line between doing a job and forgetting the people they use
force against are part of the community and will probably meet again. The participants accept this possibility, and modify their moral code to fit this reality.

Common sense

People trust their own common sense, even if it is misguided. Common sense is developed over time, experience, and developing a certain attitude of society. As for police officers that interact with some of the same people, handle the same situations, and live within the same homogenous community, their reality begins to be taken for granted. Grant, answering a question about his current expectations as a police officer, explained,

I think a lot of the times that we typify Don Quixote. We are often tilting at windmills, and where we see dragons and monsters, when in reality that best we can do is the best we can do, and I’ve always believed or come to believe that law enforcement, while it’s very physical and it seems like a young man’s game, you want the guy who can run and jump over fences and all that, it’s really a old man’s game or a wise man’s game. Because so much of what we do is bring common sense to the situation.

To paraphrase, he understands police officers see what they want to see and try to do their best. Yet, if their reality is narrowed and they fail or purposely dismiss an alternative lens, a reified common sense can be a misguided tool. What is common sense to you is not the same for me. The police officer’s reality should not be fixed or narrow as they interact with different people with different experiences. Even as the officers noted their realities should not be narrow, the descriptions of their experiences provide a
reified lens; A lens that has been developed over the course of their experiences as a police officer.

Within the police officer framework, the concept of common sense is structurally developed in the police academy (Hoggett and Stott 2010). Steve, a 49 year old man with 20 years of experience as a police officer, discussing the interaction between the police and protesters explained,

I’ve got a job to do, I agree with what you’re doing. However, if you have chosen to break the law then I don’t agree with the way you are doing it. So, it doesn’t make any difference, I mean they talk to you about that in the beginning of the academy. Is that, you know, what are you going to do if you have to – someone is protesting this and you believe strongly in it. Well, they break the law and you arrest them.

Steve exemplifies the idea that the police officer should perceive situations in black and white. If you break the law, you go to jail. This naturalized process of their duty is developed overtime. Many of the participants characterized new police officers as naïve and lacking in communication skills with the public. Some of the participants explained the transition to knowing their job took at least five years.

The reification of the police is developed as new police officers accept and approve of the culture. The new police officer may have authentic, good intentions when they started the career. Overtime, the department’s culture and other officers support, if not influence, the loss of authenticity and alienation of officer’s labor. The experienced
officers objectify and stereotype the new officer until the officer accepts the culture. The officer reified their identity to maintain normalcy within the collective.

The development of the reified officer is also noted by Charlie who stated, “I would hope in any profession what you do, you know, if you’re flipping burgers in McDonalds, “okay we’re out of cheese. I have to go get cheese.” I put it on the burger, cheese is melted, and out it goes, it’s a process.” Charlie views the duty of the police officer as routine with a specific process the officer must navigate. The officer accepts the alienation and lack of agency of their labor, as they do not question the process. By accepting the process, the relation the police have with protesters can deteriorate. The police do not use their agency to support change and protect protesters, but accept the process, even if it could oppress the protesters.

Most of the participant’s reasons why they became police officers and their current reason are consistent. When I asked what their expectations were when they become police officers, almost all the participants explained they did not have any expectations, but explained why they became a police officer. Some participants noted they wanted to help people, the job seemed exciting, fun, and challenging, but Kent summarized what almost half of the participant’s responded with,

You know a part of me wants to make that difference in the community. But basically it just came down to wanting a career, knowing that I could do this career, and trying it out.
Participants noted their current expectation was to do their job well, but they agreed it was also for financial reasons. Lincoln summarizes the reason why many of the participants continued to be police officers,

    I guess just time went by and I got married and got a house and, it became just a job...and you really draw boundaries for yourself how much you’re willing what you expect and you receive, what you put in, and you know, nobody pays me to get offended or get my feelings hurt, so I’d rather not for free.

Although most of the officers continue to be police officers for financial reasons, there were a few exceptions, as Kent stated,

    Right now, I just want to make sure that everybody that I work with; everybody that is within the <agency omitted> is well trained and safe. I take a large role in the inter-department training at our agency.

Kent was different from many of the participants because of his titles and training. Other participants did not have the same extensive training.

    For the majority, this theme relates to reification as the officers reified their identity as a commodity. As their police identity is reified over time, they rationalize their commodification as means to maintain their daily life. They maintain their narrow reality as they accept the process. Even if they had some authenticity when they began, it was lost overtime by the influence of other officers and the department. They lose
authenticity and legitimacy as they alter their own identity and their role in the community.

When including the accepted normalized process with the commodification of their identity, the police officer accepts their reified identity because it provides safety and ease during their daily life. They have certain expectations during a protest event and view their duty as job. I do not think I would have ever anticipated a major theme would be the participants’ reason to become police officers was for financial reasons. Yet, the concept supports reification as the police officer accepts their identity as a commodity. Although the individual may mean well as they express the desire to help the community, they live in an economic system that requires money to survive. The officer’s expectations early in their career to help their community decayed over time. They developed an attitude they are only doing a job. As their authenticity to help decays, they also develop an attitude people do not care about them. This attitude is supported by the protesters’ negative perceptions of the police. As the police reify their identity, they rationalize their stereotype of the protester. The protester is not the rationale person, they are. Police officers are fixed in their own reality, rejecting or dismissing others. The reification of the officer is complete as commodify themselves, objectify and stereotypes others, and loss the sense of authenticity and agency.

During a protest event, the police’s rationale is narrower. As noted before, the participants noted they do not understand why the protesters are protesting and believe it is a waste of time. Since they believe this, they develop and accept a modified moral compass that dismisses the protesters reason to protest. The participants develop a
negative or uncaring attitude toward the protester and develop the mentality they are in the right because they are doing their duty as police officers. Since the participant wants to complete their duty and move on, they will use tactics that will expedite the process, including physical force.

Perception of the public

Their reality continues to be narrowed dismissing the perceptions from the public. I include the public perceptions, because the public becomes the protesters. The participants accept the public’s negative perception of the police. A Pricilla, a 43 year old woman with 8 years police experience, stated,

> You know people talk about how law enforcement officers have really bad senses of humor or we don’t seem very compassionate or anything like that. It’s not that, that’s just how you deal with it. You do, you try to find humor in some situations and humor- if you can make humor out of something, it makes it easier to deal with. We all believe the same. We’re all human. You know, we just fortunately choose this career. It doesn’t mean that things don’t affect us just like they affect everyone else. I mean you go in there and nobody likes to deal with that first dead child or that child that’s been beaten.

She discusses the differences in personalities when dealing with the public. Police officers may also use their bad sense of humor to deal with certain situations. Lincoln also includes that the public have a negative perception of the police when he stated,
You know that, that is, this is tough, at a certain point, you’re always gonna, not always, but you’re, you’re often times gonna be demonized as the police just because that’s, that’s just the way it is.

Lincoln understands not everyone will have a positive perception of the police. Yet, he also accepts the negative perceptions, and believes the perceptions will change. The police reify their identity as they maintain their insular culture, deny or dismiss the public’s negative perception, and objectify their experience and others in humor. If the officer believes they cannot make a difference, a sense of alienation develops. If they dismiss the perceptions and realities of others, the police deny their own sense of agency, and accept the normalcy of their reified identity. Instead of developing reforms that could help their relationship with protesters, the police continue to narrow their reality.

Perceptions of the protester

The participants objectified and stereotyped the protesters. The participants believed the protesters view them as the enemy, even as the participants approved of the protester’s behavior. Kent crystalizes other participant’s frustration,

I think the only thing that makes you pause and think is just the whole confusion between the protesters perception of law enforcement and then the law enforcement’s perception of the protesters.
Although Kent’s quote is a balanced perspective, he still feels frustrated there is a conflicting relationship. Pricilla provides an alternative, but direct negative perception toward protesters,

They say stuff to you. They say stuff to try and get a rise out of you or some sort of response out of you, and you just ignore them. It’s kind of like a kid you know? If you’re not playing the game, it’s not fun anymore and then they just kind of move on.

The participants view the protesters as annoying, and sophomoric. The participants perceive they have the rationale perspective. Mark talked about an experience with a protester, who was instigating a situation,

Usually the majority of the people are just there either to see or help spread the message that wants to be spread. But there’s always going to be that small sliver those few people who want the chaos, who want to stir up people, like the anonymity and get to attack at the “man” or you know, violently believe what is going on, or just want the chaos and it doesn’t even matter if they believe in the message or not. It’s just an easy form to do it. So, usually from what I know and what I believe when things tend to turn violent, it’s because you get too any of those within a large group and the group gets high jacked.

Because there are instigators within a protest, and they will attempt to create a volatile situation, there are some protesters who need protection. The police know this, even if
they did not like the message or the protest tactic. Even so, participants viewed protesters who caused trouble intentionally, or as a form of civil disobedience, negatively. A few of the officers had positive attitudes of protesters, such as Lincoln who said, “I have a lot of respect for people that protest, because I do not know if I could do it personally.” Although the participants who discussed protesters positively, they would also discuss protesters and reasons for protesting with distain. Such as Charlie, who had positive perceptions of some types of protesting, but referred to younger protesters as ‘cannon fodder’ for being naïve.

Within a reification framework, the police officer may accept the protesters’ actions, but the lose of agency and authenticity of the job enables the police officer to accept and utilize violent actions against the protester. Instead of working with protesters, they demonize the few to justify their use of force to all.

Us vs. them. Most of the time I never had to ask about their perceptions of protesters. Their attitudes of protesters crystalized as they told their stories and discussed protest tactics. The participants believed the protesters developed a false “us against them” mentality. The participants articulated that they did not like being considering the enemy, but acknowledged why. As Holmes explained,

You know, but at the same point, it’s not you that they hate. It’s the uniform, it what it represents, it’s the authority figure. I understand that.

Kent supports this conclusion when he discussed the protesters blaming the police instead of another entity or institution,
That’s why I was kind of confused because they are treating the cops as the enemy. You know what I have nothing to do with how many trees get cut down today, and how they get cut down. I have nothing to do with that.

Unlike Kent, other participants viewed protesters actions personally. Adam, a 34 year old male with over six years as a police officer, also noted the protesters view the police as the enemy, but he also carried an attitude that the protesters were the enemy as well, “It was one of those things where you try not to get into it with them, because they are likely to try to do something to make you look bad.” Adam was talking about protesters who instigate violence or inflame a volatile situation. He also mentioned protesters were only trying to get media attention and did not care if their actions affected other people. The majority had the same opinion that attempting to prompt a discussion with protesters was usually futile, as the protesters would not want to listen or argue with the police.

The *us vs. them* mentality is very complex because of the long history between the police and the protesters. As the police officer, while reifying their identity, are also stereotyping the protester. Even if the police officer realizes the issue is complex and knows the police are not liked or not a legitimate actor in the community, they continue to accept their lack agency to change the perception. They objectify the protester as a un-rationale being as they will not change. Yet, they rationalize their own opinions by accepting the relationship between the officer and the protester will not change.
Disregarding police officer’s illegal acts

The relational disconnect with the public and protesters are compounded by the loss of agency when another officer uses overt aggressive, violent acts. The participants believe aggressive, sometimes violent, reactions are needed, but if the police action is extreme than it is the individual’s fault and consider critiquing the police institution or culture. Jacob discussed a situation about another officer’s actions,

This officer’s not an officer any more because of decisions like this, but he made is, he drew his line in the sand of people putting tents on the campus, or on the quad, or the plaza I should say. So he said, “when people put a tent on the plaza I’m gonna, I’m gonna, take that tent down.” Great dude, there’s like a 150 people out there, and there’s two of you.

Jacob’s experience also supports the argument that participants illegal police acts as something one police officer would do and not consider the problem to be institutionalized. He also discussed supporting the officer even when he knew it was wrong. His experience supports the argument of the reified identity as he accepts the loss of agency by assisting in unethical police acts even as he knows it is wrong.

Even within their own ranks, they view an illegal or immoral situation as a singularity or a situation that happened in the past, but would not happen again. As for protesters, they are separated and stereotyped as well. This stereotyped view insists that it is the protesters fault if there is violent police action. It is the protester’s fault if the police
officer had to engage them. The police officer does not perceive the institution as the problem. They only view outsiders as the problem.

**Ignorance of protests and social issues**

As participants were discussing their experiences, they would mention historically significant protests and their perception of why people protest. When considering the police are an integral factor in protest events, it was surprising to see their lack of knowledge regarding these historical protests and of social issues. For example, Holmes compares a terrorist act with non-violent movement,

> Timothy McVey, yeah his little protest of blowing up the building in Oklahoma, over and done with. But look at the civil right movement, the silent protest and everything – I don’t know why it always goes back to the bus boycott, but I mean, it’s the start of the whole movement of civil rights and it was completely nonviolent. So I think that in the long run is the way to go, but you have to have to resolve to see it through.

There are multiple topics of discussion regarding this quote. First, Holmes was attempting to show violent acts get media attention but do not progress as much as peaceful protests do. Holmes is wrong to think the Montgomery Bus Boycott was the starting point of the civil rights movement, but did spur more support for the Civil Right’s movement (Barkan 1984; Blumberg 2012). Finally the movement was anything, but silent. This participant revises history to fit his reality of what protests are and protest
tactics should be. Violent acts do increase attention, but like the comparisons of protests and sporting event, his comparisons are too extreme.

Grant continued this theme when he was discussing media attention toward protests,

The guy who was run over by a tank in Tiananmen Square, I don’t think anybody knows his name, or who he was, but that was a nonviolent protest that went around the world in a way that so many other protest that possibly never could.

While the examples used in context may make some sense, the inaccuracy is a concern. “The guy” Grant was discussing was not run over, but ran away (Makinen 2014). We may forgive the officer for not remembering everything about a historical event, but for many of the examples the limited memory is disturbing. Either the participant is comparing very different events, utilizing very different tactics, as if they are the same, or they are forgetting, or purposely forgetting, the root causes for people to protest.

As participants interpret the events to fit their reality, they use their revised history to question the current protesters reason to protest. With this interpretation, the police negatively stereotype participants and marginalize their reason to protest. Instead of acknowledging and understanding current protest events as legitimate acts, they provide inaccurate examples to justify what the protesters are doing are wrong.

As participants told their story, they would also express they did not care what the protesters are protesting, or re-frame the movement’s consciousness. Alternatively, the
participants discussed how the protesters were misinformed, naïve and should research the issues more. Many of the participants would criticize the protesters for their lack of knowledge of social issues. The police officers’ ignorance of social movement issues while their insistence that the protesters should educate themselves is at the very least paradoxical. Since the participants are part of the community, they should be more aware of the community’s local issues.

Participants acknowledged some police actions are wrong. Like the example above, they compartmentalized those police officers as individuals who made wrong decisions and not reflective of the police culture. If they did question deviant police actions, it was situations during a different time and space, for example, Homes example of the Montgomery bus boycott or, more recently, the UC Davis pepper spray situation. As Lincoln states,

> With the UC Davis pepper spray incident that’s a perfect example to me when command for what ever reasons I wasn’t them, I wasn’t there, but for what every reasons felt it was time to hurry up and somebody gave the command we need to, we need to disperse this group.

Even though Lincoln believed it was okay for the department to make a decision, under certain amount of pressure, Lincoln also discussed that following a lawful order does not exempt the officer from litigation, and continued with,
He’s just following orders, and I’m not blaming him he’s following orders, but having personally been through a few law suits, following orders doesn’t get you off the hook and they don’t teach you that in the academy…

He notes that there is a complex hypocrisy to their work. Lincoln does not blame the officer because the other officer is following orders, but he recognizes the officer could also be sued for following an order. Their financial stability is more important than not following an order that could be unethical, illegal, and could reduce their legitimacy by other officers and the community.

That is why it is important for the police officer to speak up about strategies and tactics that may not work during briefing. As noted before, I stopped asking how they would prepare for a protest because I continuously received the same answer. I also asked if they would question the department’s strategy during the briefing. Although most of the participants said they would question an illegal or unethical strategy that could get them in trouble, it seemed to be an instinctive response as no one could provide an example. The question remains, they would say they would tell the supervisor the strategy did not work, but would they actually do it?

Their ability to critique the strategy strengthens their authenticity as community protectorates, maintains their agency within their community as well as their ability to defend themselves against illegal and unethical policies. Yet, if they choose to follow blindly, accept orders with little resistance, or not advocate for themselves they lose legitimacy by other officers and the community. They lose legitimacy by other officers
by not upholding the values of a police officer. They lose legitimacy by the community
by accepting illegal and unethical orders. Overtime, they lose agency and authenticity by
accepting the normalcy of their illegal and unethical duties.

Another aspect to the participants revised history is the idea overt violence within
the police culture would not be considered today. The violent police tactics used during
the Civil Right’s Movement are experiences left in the past. If violence does occur in a
current protest event, it is something an individual officer would do or it is the protester’s
fault. For example, Charlie stated,

The battle in Seattle, that then becomes a whole different conversation,
because I think there were excesses on both sides on that one and clearly some of
the protesters made choices to go the violent route to prove their point.

Even if the participants believe it is the protester’s engagement that incites police
aggressive tactics, some of the participants discussed they could possibly relate to tactics
used by protesters. As Holmes stated,

I think a lot of the environmentalist from the early eighties and even the
early nineties from Humboldt County were right with what was going on with the
HeadWaters forest, with what LP was doing, and it turned out to be correct.

Where’s the timber industry today?
Yet, the police at the time were using violent acts toward the environmental protesters (Bevington 2009; Epstein 1991). That seemed to be forgotten or accepted as a typical situation then, but not now.

Their lack of knowledge, while expressing the desire for protesters to educate themselves, supports the police identity as insular and authoritarian. They know best, and everyone should fit within their reality. The participants support their reified identity by revising history to fit their current reality. This includes more recent events, that sparked controversy throughout the nation. However, for the participants, situations like these are accepted. They almost seek to be alienated from their work so they can be content in their opinion that the police are not always acting in the best interests of the public.

Their acceptance of the status quo is confusing because they live in the community they protect. They should know of the social and political issues within their community, but instead of using their ability to produce change or at least protect people who want to create change, they accept they can do little about it and negatively stereotype those who seek change.

Biographical availability

I also asked if they had ever protested or would consider protesting. The majority of participants stated that they would not protest because it could affect their job or career. Even if they were passionate about a social issue, they would still not consider publicly protesting. Other participants’ believed there were better methods to get a message out to the public. Jacob stated, “I personally don’t think standing out there with a sign changes much.” Additionally, their arguments to not or limit their actions in a protest
is accepted throughout the police culture (Brenner and Ness 2009). The police should not protest because who would police the police. Yet to believe that argument, we would have to assume the police would turn violent or overly aggressive during a protest. If they were rational persons who believe the protesters are immature and naive, why would it be assumed the police would also be un-rationale as well?

The puzzling disapproving attitude toward protesting is developed within the pattern that protesters should wait because either it is not the right time to protest or because “no one is dying.” The participants would wait until the government is tyrannical before they would protest, as Steve points out,

If you have a tyrannical regime that’s telling when you got to get up and when you’re going to go to bed and all that, you know, maybe that’s something you need to revolt against. I just, I don’t think that’s where we are at.

Yet, for the government to be tyrannical, the police helped to maintain order. If police officers wait to protest or deny others the right to protest, they have already accepted and contributed to the development of the tyrannical government.

For rural police officers, it seems paradoxical to believe they would wait or deny people to protest. If they were protectorates of the community, they would want their fellow community members to raise issues that affect the whole community. Yet, it makes sense the police reified their identity and role within their community as the governments enforcers, instead of community protectorates. As they have already reified their identity by accepting their status as a commodity and believing they cannot create
change. They would continue to lose or forget their own agency within the community and accept the normality of the tyrannical governmental. They continuously reify their reality to accept an easy out as they deny or dismiss another realities.

As the experiences develop into discernable patterns, the framework of reification becomes clear as the participants discuss the reasons why they became police officers, currently remain police officers, and their perceptions of protest tactics. They objectify and commodity themselves, and perceive their duties as simply a job. The police officer’s attitude attributes to their action as well and it becomes refined to objectification and common sense. The police officer reifies their status as they are influenced by police hegemony, use experiences, and develop an attitude within their flow of production as they interact with citizens. The officer’s perception of the person is taken for granted. For example, a participant stated, “I don’t care what their name is.” The protester is stereotyped, and the police’s actions making sense of the interaction, but objectifying the protester. Like a box, the protester must be removed without care or thought to allow for the continuation of the status quo. The police as an institution (Thomason 1982:92), “attributes a kind of universal facticity concreteness, autonomy, [sic] and impersonality…[sic] which must be ordered and the uniqueness and diversity of life must be suppressed.” The police officer reifies their actions and objectifies the protester to stop or limit systematic disruptions in the social world. They rationalize their actions as common sense and fail to include another reality.

With the increase in police militarization, it becomes a problem for rural police departments and rural communities. The police officer is already becoming reified as
they accept their labor as commodity and objectify protesters. With the increase and acceptance in violent police tactics within the general police culture, the rural police departments have also accepted funds and resources from the federal government too (Nadelmann 1993). The uncaring attitude coupled with lack of morality toward protesters could develop the attitude that violent tactics are acceptable. This is even more concerning because they are utilizing violent tactics toward a community of which they are members.
CONCLUSION

This study on rural police officers and protests aims to explore the interactions and attitudes of the police officer who had experience doing protest policing. My intention was to reveal a broader understanding of rural protest policing by interviewing the individual police officer. This study began before the protests that developed after police shooting in Ferguson, MO, which brought national attention to police conduct and anti-police movements. Yet, the issue of the police’s protest strategies has grown in important as police are becoming militarized, and the police tactics and culture has been questioned by police-reform activists and scholars (Gelderloos 2007; Gillham and Marx 2000). This chapter will summarize the research objectives, results, and propose a conclusion based on the results. Research recommendations will be included, specifically to advance similar research, but also other possible contributions to rural policing.

Research Objectives

An aim of the study was to explore police perceptions of protesting. From the prior studies, police had a negative perception of protesting, which is backed by my results as well. Using reification, the police stereotyping people and marginalizing other realities. What can be gained from this finding is the police culture and identity that attempts to be isolation while being stoic and hard nosed is counter-intuitive. Even as rural police officers may be more communicative than urban officers, the generalized
culture encourages barriers, which develops misunderstandings. If the perception of protesting and the protest shifted to a positive approach, what ever approach that may be, there may be more common ground than previously known.

From the results, some participants viewed protesting as beneficial, and some participants could support certain protests. The issue reminds that most of the participants viewed protests as unproductive and wasted time. Many of the participants believed people should wait to protest, but waiting may be too late. On the other hand, if the police utilized a cooperative approach, where the police and the protester work together, it may be more beneficial to all groups. Especially in smaller communities were people know each other and are more homogeneous. Yet, the transition of cultures and identities, police and protesters alike, will take time. I would highly suggest future research to explore other rural police officers and agencies perceptions of protesting and the protester. I would include the exploration of the police identity and its effect on the group, especially considering stress and the loss of identity, as well as the duty of the officer.

In order for the police institution to change, the change must come within and through the police population. The financial reason for the participant to be police officers was surprising, if not shocking. Society is influenced to believe the police are there to protect and serve. There were participants who expressed like-minded reasons, but would they have volunteered their time to protect and to serve? Many of them expressed they probably would not. This conclusion is supported by reification as people
objectify and view themselves as a commodity. The individual is providing a service that will maintain the flow of production for all.

Limitations

The study filled a gap in prior research, but there were hiccups during the planning and process as well. First, this study lacked funding and additional resources, as well as additional lens and perspectives throughout the process. Although participants discussed certain topics and the study was exploratory, I did not consider general topics in the planning stages such as racial, ethnic, gender, and class. Throughout the process I would discover and rediscover academic articles that could have been beneficial to sections already completed or already in advanced stages. Also, as interviews were being conducted questions were either not used, modified, or new questions were added over time. For example, I stopped asking about how the participants were briefed before the protest event, because I almost always received the same answer. Although modifying questions is normalized within qualitative research, there were gaps in certain research areas.

The research location and demographics of the participant pool were narrow. The racial demographics of the region were mostly white, as were the majority of the active police officers in the region. It would be interesting for a future study to be a non-white community. I would also recommend the same research location with more depth and focus regarding race and gender identities within the police community. Finally, I had to
consider time and space of the interviews. The anti-police protests in Ferguson, Missouri began as I was finishing the final few interviews. There was a discussion on including more interviews, but I believed the Fergusons protests would have skewed some of the data.

Looking Forward

The reification of the police will continue if the police believe they are serving the government’s needs instead of the people’s needs. This is especially important for rural police officers who live within the community they work. I would highly suggest police research and implement protest methods that build relationships with the protesters before a protest. Instead of the police pushing back the protesters, marginalizing people’s reason to protest, the police should be protecting people’s rights and upholding democratic values. If they continue to believe other community members are wasting time by protesting, and developing a reality that marginalizes those people, they will continue to forget their duties to protect and serve their community, and continue to view their job as a means to pay a bill.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

You are asked to participate in a one-to-one interview about the perceptions and attitudes of police officers during a social movement event. This research is part of my master’s thesis work at Humboldt State University. I anticipate the interview will take up to approximately one hour.

During the interview, I will ask questions about your attitudes, perceptions and experiences when working during a social movement event.

Your participation is voluntary and with minimal risk. You may discontinue participation at any time. However, you may find benefits in talking and reflecting on your experiences. Although there will not be any compensation, your contributions may benefit other law enforcement officers and build a better understanding of police culture.

Your answers to all questions are completely confidential. I will transcribe our interview and destroy the original digital audio recording within 30 days. Identifying information will be removed and real names replaced by pseudonyms. My records linking your transcription with your contact information will be kept in a secure location separate from the transcripts. By May 30, 2015, I will transfer electronic transcript files and this consent form to the Humboldt State University Department of Sociology for secure 3-year storage and I will destroy all paper and electronic files in my possession related to this project.

In the analysis and reporting of any information linked to this research, all identifying information will be removed. If I use any quotations from your interview, I may change some information so that your identity will not be revealed. If using a quotation could compromise your privacy, I will not use that quotation.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me: Patric Esh, pee14@humboldt.edu or my committee chairperson, Renee Byrd, Professor of Sociology, at (707) 826-4569 ext. 4563 or Renee.Byrd@humboldt.edu

You may also share any concerns about this evaluation with the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, report them to the Humboldt State University Dean of Research, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5169.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experiences. Do you have any questions or comments at this time?

***

I am at least 18 years old. I understand the above and consent to participate in this research.
Print Name:__________________________________________

Signature:__________________________________________ Date:______
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. How long have you been a police officer?
3. How long have you been on patrol within your whole career?
4. How many law enforcement agencies have you worked for?
5. When you first started your career as a police officer, what do you think it would be like?
6. How has it been compared to that?
7. Could you describe any public events you have been assigned to work as a police officer?
8. How many were protest events, such as protest, strike, sit-in
9. How do you prepare for those events? Such as meetings/briefs.
10. When working during a protest event, what were your overall thoughts before you started?
11. How have you mentally prepared yourself to work during a protest movement event?
12. What were your thoughts after you done?
13. What was the longest protest event you worked, and how long was it?
14. What were the reasons you had to work for so long?
15. How would you define a non-violent protest event?
16. What do you think about people who limit or stop public movement as a form of protest?
17. Any reasons, if any, do you believe they were right to protest like that?
18. What would you do if you were assigned to work during a political or social cause event that you may believe in or are in support of?
19. Describe any consequences by the administration if an officer decided not to work during a protest event?
20. Describe any consequences by other police officers if an officer decided not to work during an event?
21. What would you do if your administration allowed an action again a social movement during a protest that you considered a violation of their rights?
22. Are there any reasons you would consider protesting?
23. What types of protesting you would consider?
24. What is your gender?
25. What is your age?
APPENDIX C

Interview Invitation

Hello <Insert Name Here>,

My name is Patric Esh and I am a Humboldt State University sociology graduate student. I am contacting you for an interview regarding your experience with protests.

Your participation would be beneficial to the understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of rural and small town law enforcement officers who have worked during a protest event. All information you provide will be confidential and will not have obvious identifying information. Additional information is attached below.

Please contact me at patric.esh@humboldt.edu if you would like to participate. Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully submitted,

Patric Esh
Graduate Student, Sociology
Humboldt State University
patric.esh@humboldt.edu