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Identity Formation During Nonviolent Protests: A Thematic and Structural Narrative Analysis of Interviews Conducted with March for Our Lives Protesters

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Identity Formation During Nonviolent Protests: A Thematic and Structural Narrative Analysis of
Interviews Conducted with March for Our Lives Protesters

by

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A Dissertation Presented to the
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
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This dissertation was submitted by Richard Shawn Queeney under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract

In the spring of 2018, student protesters around the United States took to the streets and campuses of their schools to call for tighter gun control laws following the mass shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, FL. The highly visible nonviolent protest movement, known as the March for Our Lives (MFOL), was carried out by young people still in middle or high school and was fraught with risks that included disagreement with parents, teachers, and school administrators, detention or other penalties on their school record, and threats of violent harassment from counter protesters. MFOL protesters in and around southeastern Pennsylvania were interviewed in the fall of 2020 and the results were analyzed using a structural and narrative analysis to determine how they perceived themselves, the MFOL movement, and counter-protesters. All of the participants spoke of their experiences, perspectives, and relationships within the movement, as well as relationships with teachers, administrators, family members and friends. The analysis highlighted themes such as openness to new ideas, intersectionality of social issues, protest as an opportunity for growth, learning and connection with others, motivations and choices for participating in protest, and how they supported one another in response to counter-protesters. The accounts provided a wide variety of form, structure, and coherence that led to detailed narrative analysis of identity formation and how it occurred in the context of a nonviolent social movement centered on school shootings, gun violence, and gun control.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this qualitative, thematic and structural narrative study, protester attitudes and perceptions were examined in relation to the nonviolent social movement (NSM) they participated in while they attempted to effect a change in policy and culture. I examined protester identity formation and perspectives built while participating in the gun violence and gun control movement known as March for Our Lives (MFOL). This project analyzed perceptions protesters had of themselves and how those perceptions contributed to their personal identity, perspectives, and motivations for joining the movement and the possibility of continuing protest activity. The aforementioned also explained how related to the effectiveness of the messaging employed by an NSM.

I examined individual identity and how it linked to personal political salience and participation in a social movement with the long-term goal of affecting change at the legislative and cultural level. Seventeen themes emerged to reveal motivations for joining the MFOL protest movement, how protesters saw the movement while conducting protest, how they connected personally and supported one another before, during and after protests, and their reactions to counter protesters. Interviewees also discussed two possible paths forward to resolve the tensions and conflict connected to gun ownership, gun violence, and the gun culture within the United States. These two paths forward will be expanded upon later in this dissertation. The remainder of this chapter will include the context this study took place in, the problem statement, the purpose of this study, research questions that framed the work, theoretical approaches that formed the foundation of this study, an overview of the research design, possible scholarly and practical contributions, definition of key terms used in the dissertation, and assumptions, de-

limitations, and limitations of the study. The chapter closes with a preview of the entire dissertation.

Context of this Study

Generally, NSMs are worthy of study by the conflict resolution researcher and practitioner because NSMs expose the fissures and fault lines within society. Specific to the MFOL and the young people who organized, marched, and participated in this nonviolent civil disobedience, this movement and gun ownership and gun violence provide a major fissure and fault line within American society. These fissures and fault lines provide an opportunity for the conflict analysis scholar and practitioner to wade into this polarizing issue and work to transform the issue at hand, which is what this study hopes to do. Given the fact that gun sales in 2020 exceeded the previous year by sixty-eight percent (Economist, 2021) and that three awful mass shootings have occurred within weeks of this writing in April 2021.

From about 2007-2008 in the United States, with American reeling from the economic downturn, The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements ushered in what many may consider a renaissance of social and political protest in the United States that "rivals or surpasses the 1960s. Americans are increasingly turning to protest as a way to express their dissatisfaction with government" (Heaney, 2018, p. 43). Thanks to an aging baby boomer generation and a maturing millennial generation, a host of pressing social, political, and environmental challenges combined with social media technology has allowed NSMs to organize more efficiently. In addition, protesters raised awareness, aired grievances, and made their cases for change to policy and attitude within the United States. The social movements range from the well-known and politically influential, such as the Tea Party movement to infamous and controversial movements, such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and the Climate Strike Protests

headed by Greta Thunberg. These movements have left a significant mark on American (and global) culture and politics, redefining the role NSMs have in our society. Even while the global pandemic of Covid-19 raged through 2020, Americans took to the streets to protest government restrictions during the pandemic to police killings of George Floyd and others.

However, one particular NSM has emerged as an especially contentious movement in the United States: March for Our Lives (MFOL). MFOL, the narrative analysis subject for this study, emerged in the wake of the shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, FL, which occurred on February 14, 2018. Within a month of the massacre, students mobilized and organized a mass protest the size and scope of which had not been seen since the Vietnam era in the United States (Heaney, 2018). Students at all levels of K-12 organized walk-out protests throughout the spring of 2018. Some of these protests were sanctioned and recognized by school administrators but others were not. Sometimes, students faced suspension and marks on their permanent records for participating in a protest at their school (Yee & Blinder, 2018, p. A1). The movement quickly garnered celebrity and corporate support, placing gun control legislation on the political agenda in the 2018 mid-term and 2020 presidential elections.

Gun ownership and gun violence are forms of structural and cultural violence at the heart of what the MFOL movement hopes to change. Gun-related violence has continued its dreadful march forward even after the high-profile protests. Political leaders have done little to curb the gun violence that continues to make the United States an outlier among other industrialized nations. In 2019 alone, Gun Violence Archive (n.d.) published there were 15,208 deaths from guns with 692 children aged 0-11 killed or injured and 3,068 teens aged 12-17 killed or injured from guns. That same year, there were 417 mass shootings (four or more shot or killed, not

counting the shooter), up from 337 in 2018. When compared to other nations around the globe, the United States is exceptional for its violent gun deaths with 4.43 per 100,000. In 2017, Japan and China experienced just 0.04 per 100,000 deaths. The United Kingdom experienced 0.06 per 100,000, Bangladesh experienced 0.07 per 100,000, and Romania experienced 0.08 per 100,000 people (Aizenmen & Silver, 2019).

Clearly, the MFOL protesters realize the gravity of the situation they face and they know it. Walsh (2018) quotes Emma Gonzalez, a high-profile protester in MFOL, who told reporters that the movement:

> Is probably gonna be years, and at this point, I don't know that I mind. Nothing that's worth it is easy. We're going against the largest gun lobby. We could very well die trying to do this. But we could very well die not trying to do this, too. So why not die for something rather than nothing? (Walsh, 2018, p. 6)

Problem Statement

The MFOL movement has made tremendous strides engaging young people to take up a major political, social, and cultural fight. Attempting to reverse centuries of enforcement of the second Amendment and America's cultural embrace of guns and violence will need more than simply a march or a clever hashtag. For this movement to have a voice and create reasonable gun policies and solutions that ensure the safety of citizens throughout the U.S., it will need a sustained, resilient, and broad social and political movement made up of dedicated activists and protesters. This study illustrated how MFOL connected local level protest into a nationwide movement to work to transform gun control legislation and to transform the conflict through dialogue and engagement with people who oppose their message and goals.

Transformation of the conflict is related to the problem studied here. I was focused on whether individual protesters have the political consciousness, commitment, and the sense of self to engage in this struggle over the long term. Hence, the approach of this study was to explore, examine, and articulate protester identity as it related to this controversial and complicated issue of gun control. By examining protester identity and how it developed as they protested, I hoped to draw connections between that personal development and how this conflict of gun ownership within a gun culture might be transformed by revealing how protesters interacted with one another, built relationships with the movement and their personal circle of family and friends, and how they navigated the social and political landscape to engage, persuade, work, and live day to day. Within this context there is the greatest potential for change and by talking to protesters, I built a set of recommendations they felt would transform the issue at hand and do so fairly, respectfully, and with everyone's interests at the center.

This study also has value because it interviewed protesters over two years after they protested in the MFOL movement. This lapse in time allows for greater reflection and growth and provides much needed space for individuals to reflect, consider, and re-construct their history when interviewed. Given the ebb and flow of how social issues are attended to within movements and across society, it is reasonable to assume protesters may lose interest in an issue. This loss of momentum can have serious ramifications for a movement and the individuals within the movement, which is why it was necessary to study identity with issues such as perception, motivations, and social connections that exist around the protester.

Since the protesters are the primary focus of this dissertation, I examined the perceptions of the students involved in the protests rather than examine the public's perceptions of this movement or how media outlets frame the movement. Mainly, I elicited the protesters'

perceptions of how they connected with the movement at the personal level, how their identity and attitude were affected because of their participation in this movement, what motivated them to join and march, and how effective they felt the messaging of the protest was at their location and at the national level. I gathered their perspectives as to the long-term prospects of the movement and whether or not they will continue to protest or engage publicly. Finally, I investigated how protesters connect with other protesters within the same movement through different social media platforms. The interviews and analysis I conducted provided an array of possibilities researchers, scholars, organizers, and protesters may want to adopt when considering what is next for their social movement, whether it is related to gun reform or not. MFOL protesters proved themselves to be resilient, clever, and fast in their organization and they articulated positive expectations for the next phase of the MFOL movement as it partners with intersecting movements. For example, many stated the necessity of gun reform legislation coupled with greater racial justice and even the elimination of poverty as movements that may emerge. Perhaps the next era of social movements will be more hybridized in their approach to increase the number of protesters and the pressure they can exert on elected officials and the public in general.

There may be cause for hope and perhaps even momentum for reform. Since the MFOL protests, we have seen corporate America step up and act. Major retailers like Dick's Sporting Goods and Wal-Mart have altered their policies regarding the sale of guns. In September of 2019, 145 business leaders sent a letter to the Senate leaders "urging an expansion of background checks to all firearm sales and stronger 'red flag' laws" (Sorkin, 2019, p. A1). Days before corporate leaders sent that letter to Capitol Hill, a poll by NPR (2018) found widespread and bipartisan support among Americans for increased regulations to curb gun violence, such as

increased funding for mental health screenings and universal background checks. After a 20-year drought, Congress approved $25 million to be split between the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institute of Health (NIH) so they can study four major areas of gun violence: "The scope of the problem, the causes of violence, the strategies that work to prevent it, and the best way to implement those strategies." (Wetsman, 2019) Based on the advances afforded to the researchers by MFOL and members of Congress, I am cautiously optimistic and feel this provides ample justification as to why gun violence should be studied.

With this context and cautious optimism in mind, this section will conclude with a discussion of how learning about protester attitudes helps advance knowledge in conflict resolution. Analysis of protester perceptions, attitudes, and motivations will advance our understanding of the interplay between identity and outcomes. By examining their narratives, this study built clear pictures of the interplay between how individuals saw themselves (Private self), how they wanted others to see them (Public or presenting self), and how they managed those two senses of self while participating in civil disobedience on a controversial, politically-charged issue. This expanded understanding of identity in high-stakes protest activity will add to the literature by bringing specific perspectives to the surface with greater detail and while adding to an interrogation of structural and cultural violence from a highly localized perspective. This builds on and extends the work on identity, personal political salience, openness, protest, motivation and efficacy as seen in Curtin, Stewart, and Duncan (2010), L. E. Duncan (2005), and Lauren E. Duncan and Stewart (2007). Ultimately, this study hoped to add to a greater understanding of socially situated interactions such as identity formation embedded in interpersonal interactions, cultural dynamics, and institutional (Protests in schools) and historical contexts (Protests following significant events such as mass shootings) (Chase, 2018).

Regarding perceptions and interventions, two inter-related issues emerge: One, how do the perceptions of the activists further illustrate the efficacy of the proposed interventions such as sustained dialogue, to transform this conflict? Two, what is the connection between activist identity perceptions and the process of an intervention? The perceptions of the MFOL protesters formed the foundation for the interventions proposed at the end of this dissertation. Beyond the activities of mobilizing, organizing, and protesting, activists engaged with counter protesters, persuading teachers, administrators, and even family members frequently. Rather than look to confront aggressively or ignore opposing points of view, protesters I interviewed were willing, able, and saw positive results emerge when they engaged in dialogue with people on the other side. While discerning between constructive and destructive storytelling, Senehi (2002) showed the power of storytelling and the connection to constructive dialogic approaches to peacebuilding through a fostering of collaborative power and mutual recognition, along with the creation of opportunities for openness, insight, a means to bring issues to consciousness, and a means of resistance. Senehi further connects narrative constructs such as knowledge, identity, socialization, emotions, morality, time and memory, and geographic space to a transformative peace process of groups in long-standing conflict to engage in dialogue to develop a shared sense of identity. Wallach (2004) also endorsed narrative and dialogue to help transform conflict at the inter-group level and to help people live with the uncertainties, paradoxes, and anxieties of conflict. K. V. Korostelina (2012) suggests a reframing of narratives to solve intergroup conflict to include mediated messages and even altered historical pedagogies to foster positive relations between groups. Finally, by applying the models endorsed by Saunders (1999 and 2016), a five-step dialogue process could be implemented to transform the conflict and build a path towards resolution. This study addresses those two interconnected messages and brings the possibility of

transforming the entrenched conflict of gun ownership, mass shootings, and gun violence into greater focus.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined the perspectives of regular member protesters in predominantly young protest movements specifically on gun violence in schools, also known as the March for Our Lives (MFOL) movement. Five perspectives under study in this project included: (1) how protesters connected with the MFOL movement and what got them to join and march. (2) why protesters were motivated to participate in this movement. (3) how protesters perceived the movement then and how they feel about it now that two years have elapsed since the time of the initial protests. (4) how effective protesters feel the protests were in terms of achieving the movement's goals. (5) their thoughts on the quality of the messaging the movement used.

Research Questions

Given the focus of this study, the highly personal perceptions and experiences of protesters who participated (and may have experienced gun violence themselves) in a nonviolent social movement to curtail gun violence in their local community, one may anticipate strong overlap between the protester and the other protesters within the movement, family members, authority figures, and members of the general public who might interact with protesters. The central question that emerged is connected to personal political salience and whether protesters have the sense of self (identity), political consciousness, and the commitment to engage in this movement over the long term to realize legislative action and reform of existing gun laws. Based on this central question and purpose of this study, the research questions for this study were:

RQ1: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement?

RQ 2: How did protesters view the MFOL movement?

RQ3: What motivated them to join the MFOL movement?

RQ4: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they marched, and after marches?

RQ5: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement?

These five research questions served many purposes: They provided a framework for my research in the literature review, allowed me to create in-depth interview questions that explored the key areas of my study, and allowed me to link interviewee responses to reveal themes for narrative thematic and structural analysis and discussion on protester perspectives about how effective they feel the movement was in 2018 and how effective and relevant they think it is. I provide a complete interview protocol in Chapter III.

Three Theoretical Approaches

This section will discuss the three theoretical approaches used in this study related to perspectives, identity, and motivations of protesters and how those variables relate to a nonviolent social movement like March for Our Lives. The three approaches include a 'Culturist' or Social Constructivist approach articulated by Jasper and Goodwin (2015), Frame Theory as articulated by Lakoff (2003), and Cultural and Structural Violence as articulated by Galtung (1969, 1990). These three theoretical orientations provided me with a deeper understanding of the socially constructed nature of the phenomenon under review in this dissertation. Identity, perception, gun violence, protest, and the possibility to transform the gun culture – at the root of this intractable conflict – are all realized in the three theoretical perspectives employed in this study. The culturist/social constructivist perspective helped direct me towards interviews and narrative analysis as methodological approaches. Through learning more about Frame Theory, I created interviewed questions that would allow interviewees to provide much-needed context in

relation to their development and their protest activities. Galtung's Structural and Cultural violence provided me with a much-needed framework to better understand gun violence in America and the slow to non-existent response of the United States federal government, given a public health crisis.

The Culturist or Social Constructivist Perspective

When answering the question: 'When and why do social movements occur?', Jasper and Goodwin (2015) traced numerous threads of thinking regarding movements. These threads included mass society theorists, resource mobilization theorists, political process theorists, and structural and cultural approaches, known as Frame Theory. I expanded on these three paradigms along with two additional approaches, known as 'The European Approach', which are used to examine social movements in the literature review. This study mainly assumed a cultural and structural approach that also included Frame Theory.

To Jasper and Goodwin (2015), Culturalists have reasserted the importance of perceptions, ideas, emotions, and grievances, all of which mobilization and process theorists once thought did not matter or could simply be taken for granted. However, these are examined in broader social and political changes, not in isolation from each other. This is precisely why I studied this social movement from this perspective. I argue this movement is unique because of the issue it is protesting against, the makeup of the protesters, and the tone their protests have taken. This framework also links to personal political salience, or the attachment of personal meaning to social and political events (Duncan, 2007). As seen in the interviews I conducted, protesters in this movement attached a high degree of personal salience and fear of gun violence happening in their school was a major concern. These perceptions, ideas, emotions, and grievances deserve deep analysis and thought beyond what is covered in the mainstream media.

Frame Theory

Besides the culturalist/social constructivist perspective I adopted for this study, I utilized the key ideas of frame theory and built clear and effective descriptions of protester identities and perspectives. By analyzing the problem through this framework, I was able to examine intra and interpersonal dynamics, rather than general message framing. Of special interest was how individual protester frames overlap and connect between protesters as well as between protesters and the movement generally, between protesters and gun rights supporters, and between protesters and the public. This overlap and connection helped enhance perceptions, ideas, emotions, and grievances.

According to Miller (2005, p. 205), there are four guiding principles to framing theory relevant to this study: First, context matters. Words, ideas and concepts do not exist in a vacuum but relate to other words, ideas, and concepts for comprehension. Second, understanding occurs based on a mental map or worldview and this worldview is brought to bear. Third, shared meaning and understanding involves traversing that worldview. Fourth, mental processes build mental habits. Frame theory helped extrapolate those culturally articulated meanings as they related to individual perspectives, perceptions, and motives. By utilizing these concepts with narrative thematic and structural analysis, I was able to contextualize and situate protesters at the local level in Bucks County, Pennsylvania as they protested a mass school shooting at a school over one-thousand miles away in Parkland, Florida.

As the literature review will reveal, gaps persist in the examination of MFOL movement and gun violence protests over the past two years. Further, as articulated by Jasper and Goodwin (2015) and Barash and Webel (2018), movements are usually viewed from a macro-structural perspective through newspaper or media reports of protests or from a remote perspective that

relegates the protester perspective to the sidelines. This study hoped to examine this movement and perspectives from the ground level so they can be closely examined. This approach provided insights on how to maximize capacity within the MFOL social movement so it can pressure legislators over the long term to pass common sense gun control laws that ensure the safety of all citizens in the U.S. Culturalist theory and frame theory assisted me in bringing the protesters and the MFOL movement into greater focus so it is not relegated to distant perspective but into a more personal and dynamic perspective.

Galtung's Structural and Cultural Violence

The final theoretical perspective that informed this work was Johan Galtung's theory of structural and cultural violence. In his seminal 1969 article, Galtung (1969) argues that violence is "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual" (1969, p. 168). Structural violence occurs when societal structures indirectly or potentially contribute to violence perpetrated on individuals in a society. There are two main structures framing gun violence in the United States: First, the Second Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Second, the National Rifle Association (NRA), which is the lobbying arm of gun manufacturers in the United States.

The Second Amendment reads, "a well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed" (U.S. ConstitutionAmendment II). The Second Amendment has been the bedrock on which gun manufacturers and gun rights advocates have built their claims upon through the years. The Second Amendment has withstood challenges repeatedly. The courts and legislators at every level have repelled even the most benign of gun-control legislation, such as universal background checks. The NRA is the main lobbying arm that helps ensure legislation remains benign or non-existent. Behind AARP, the NRA is the second-largest lobbying organization in

the U.S. These two pieces of the puzzle are keys to understanding the structural nature of gun violence. Structural and cultural violence matters to this study because it is precisely what protesters in the MFOL movement are seeking to change. Individual protesters are bound within these structures, from family units, schools, and social units they become part of on a day to day basis. Structure and culture are central to the day to day lives of protesters and therefore deserve to be studied in this context. These three theoretical perspectives – culturalist, frame theory, and Galtung's theory of cultural and structural violence – form the foundation for this study. I will discuss the research questions that guided this study in the following section.

Overview of Research Design

I used a qualitative approach to examine MFOL and gather data. I conducted ten interviews with protesters who actively participated in the MFOL movement during the spring of 2018. Most protesters were active in school districts across Bucks county in suburban Philadelphia, PA. One interviewee was a student at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, FL. Many participants knew one another and also knew people with a high profile in the MFOL movement. While protesters met and connected during the large national protest in Washington D.C. in 2018, the majority of their protest activity was at the local level in their respective schools.

Interviews were the method I used to gather narrative data for analysis. According to Morris (2015, p. 3), a semi-structured in-depth interview is similar to a conversation in that two individuals discuss a topic of mutual interest and, ideally, the discussion is relaxed, open, and honest. Morris indicates that semi-structured interviews should be flexible and free flowing, of varying length and frequency, and preferably conducted face-to-face (but is not a strict requirement). Interviews were conducted in November 2020 via Zoom to minimize contact and

maintain social distancing guidelines during Covid-19. Given the topic at hand and the nature of protest activity, interviews were the ideal method to engage and interact with protesters. Mosley (2013, p. 5) argues that interviews are an important and distinct means of understanding contemporary political actions and outcomes. In addition, Morris (2015, p. 7) lists a variety of strengths and advantages of interviewing including access to rich personal data, ability to understand individual's context and motivations, the interviewer's ability to follow-up and probe responses, interviewee's ability to talk about what they think is important, and obtaining non-verbal information from observing body language and tone. To gather data on perceptions, perspectives, motivations, connections, and relationships, a narrative analysis using semi-structured interviews aligned best and resulted in rich and thick descriptions from protesters which led to a rich analysis.

I used a thematic narrative and structural narrative analysis methodology to analyze the over five-hundred pages of transcripts the interviews generated. Through that analysis, I was able to clearly map protester perspectives, attitudes, and how they engaged with the movement, one another, and the public they were looking to persuade. Narrative analysis allowed me to examine protesters and the movement over a time span of two years so protesters could reflect on their reasons for joining the movement, their role in the movement, and how effective they think the movement was in persuading people to support enhanced gun control legislation in the U.S. This more mature perspective along with a 'then and now' view allowed for interesting data points to emerge organically. A thematic and structural narrative analysis allowed for in-depth data collection from multiple protesters and allowed me to develop themes of those perceptions.

Creswell (2013) defines narrative research as having some of these defining features: Researchers collect stories from individuals about their experiences. These experiences shed

light on identities and how individuals see themselves. Stories are gathered through different

forms of data, such as interviews. Finally, narrative stories contain turning points that occur

within a specific place or situation, also known as a context. To extend this notion of context and

narrative and the valuable intersection it represents, Riessman (2008, p. 3) articulates the point

thusly: "the central place of narrative when personal lives and social institutions intersect in the

'ruling regimes' of schools, social welfare departments, workplaces, hospitals, and

governments." This intersection of the personal lives and social institutions is the territory I

explored in this study. Especially since narratives are created and shared for a particular audience

at moments in history and draw upon shared discourses and values within a larger culture.

"Narrative illuminates human actions and complexity" (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 18) and it

is within this context of gun violence, mass shootings, and protest (human actions) and what to

do about this intractable conflict (complexity) this study resides. The following section will

define key terms and concepts relevant to this study.

Scholarly and Practical Contributions

There are three scholarly and practical contributions I hoped to make because of this

study. First, contribute to scholarly knowledge within the field of conflict resolution, nonviolent

social movements, and protest by applying narrative and structural analysis methodologies to a

specific group – protesters – to learn how their identities were affected by engaging with this

protest movement. This study extends the possibilities of narrative research by combining

thematic and structural narrative analysis to examine the intersections of identity, protest, and the

possibilities of transforming a deeply entrenched form of structural and cultural violence.

Second, I hope to contribute and expand on how structural and cultural violence might be

best addressed in the context of gun violence within the United States. As my interviews and

analysis revealed, the protesters quickly saw the intersectionality of their work. Many articulated the need to work with other movements, be they racial justice movements such as Black Lives Matter or environmental action movements. The interconnected nature of unemployment, poverty, violence, and even environmental concerns such as access to clean drinking water or housing near dangerous environmental conditions was evident once protesters from around the country communicated on this common issue of gun violence. The issues mentioned here are structural and cultural.

Third, based on the interviews I conducted with protesters from MFOL and feedback I received from them, I aim to recommend transform this conflict which will draw on the work of Karina V. Korostelina (2012) and how to form a culture of peace. To do this, I plan to build on applying sustained dialogues covered by Saunders (1999) as two possibilities for addressing structural and cultural violence. I will explain these practices and recommendations later on in this dissertation as possible solutions movements can embrace to address tensions surrounding gun control and gun ownership.

On a related note, this study may also relate to the practice of organizing and managing social movements or social justice organizations going forward. By gathering protester perspectives and insights about the movement, its effectiveness, and its ability to foster connections and build identities, organizers can develop best practices for mobilization, persuasion, and messaging to the public. While these concerns are more organizational, they are still germane to this dissertation and to managers of these movements. Because of more protest activity in the United States, social movements are quickly co-opted and it resembles mergers and acquisitions in the corporate world. For example, before MFOL, there were several small, grass roots gun control organizations. Once the MFOL movement received mainstream media

coverage, corporate, philanthropic, and celebrity interest peaked. Money flooded into the movement. Now, large money donors, such as former presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg and financier George Soros, fund the largest social activist movement related to guns – Every Town for Gun Safety –. While the focus of this dissertation is not about the effectiveness of this business or management model, my research is still relevant to the organizer/manager interested in how protesters see and feel about the movement they are participating in over the long term. The concept of building capacity for a long-term movement is imperative for changing America's deeply embedded gun culture. Beyond funding or lobbying influence in Washington D.C., the social movement(s) looking to alter gun laws and regulations must think about the people involved in the campaign for the long-term. This is a significant challenge the movement will face going forward.

Definition of Terms

These terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this study.

Civil Disobedience: "A deliberate peaceful violation of particular laws, decrees, regulations, ordinances, military or police commands, or other orders. (Sharp, 2012, p. 21)

Cultural Violence: "Any aspect of culture, such as language, religion, ideology, art or cosmology, is used to legitimize direct or structural violence." (Hyndman, 2009)

Frame Theory (also, Framing Theory): "Conceptualization or behavioral principles or standards, as in "frame of reference." It can be the meaning or definition an individual assign to an issue, or the decision maker's understanding of the consequences of actions and choices. Framing reflects individual biases and interpretative paradigms." (N.A., 2002)

Narrative (also, Narrative Analysis): "Narratives are often viewed as more than simply stories about events or other people. Rather they are seen as an important way of making sense of both individual and collective experience. Simply put, it is said that in telling particular stories about others and ourselves we are actively constructing a sense of who we are as individuals, and as cultural collectives." (Swann, Deumert, Lillis, & Mesthrie, 2004)

*Nonviolence (also, nonviolent campaign, nonviolent action, and nonviolent struggle): "*Attempts to fight violence where at least one of the actors abstains from using physical violence. This definition has two aspects: against violence and without violence, meaning that a nonviolent action is not only about the absence of violence but is part of a struggle against the violence of others." (Sorensen & Johansen, 2016, p. 685)

People Power: "Predominantly nonviolent mass popular protest and resistance, as applied against a ruler regarded as tyrannical or corrupt." (Sharp, 2012, p. 62)

Persistence: "The method is escalated by an increase in the effort behind the action, the risks the activists are willing to take, or the pain they are prepared to endure." (Sorensen & Johansen, 2016, p. 689)

Perspective: "How another sees or experiences the world." (Emler, 2006a, p. 1)

Positive Peace: "A condition of active cooperation and goodwill in conducting the normal activities of the society, in dealing with existing problems, and in improving social, economic, and political conditions." (Sharp, 2012, p. 66)

Protest: "Expression of objection and disapproval by words or actions." (Sharp, 2012, p. 68)

Political Power: "The totality of means, influences, and pressures available to determine and implement policies for the society, especially the institutions of government or the State, or in opposition to them." (Sharp, 2012, p. 64)

Self-concept: "The self is a relatively stable set of perceptions of who we are in relation to ourselves, to others, and to social systems." (A. G. Johnson, 2000, p. 1)

Social Constructivism (also, Constructivism, Culturist): "The view that a given phenomenon does not possess an independent existence but is 'constructed'—that is, generated and maintained through collective human action, thought, discourse, or other social practices. Social constructivism is primarily a position in philosophy of science, but it also informs and inspires a number of recently influential schools within the empirical social sciences themselves." (Collin, 2013)

Social identity or Identity: "People, to an important degree, derive a sense of who they are and thus of their own worth (self-esteem) from the groups they belong to." (Emler, 2006b, p. 1)

*Social Movement: "*Conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means." (Goodwin & Jasper, 2015, p. 9)

Structural Violence: "Violence caused by social and economic injustices resulting in diminished access of marginalized groups to basic needs and humane quality of life; operates at local, national, international, and global levels, and requires varying degrees of political repression." (Swee-Hin & Floresca-Cawagas, 2008)

Assumptions, De-limitations, and Limitations

Researcher Assumptions

Gun violence in the United States was one factor that convinced me to pursue a Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CARD) at Nova Southeastern University (NSU). I grew up around gun owners, enthusiasts, and hunters and have spent the last 40-plus years watching the steady drumbeat of gun violence and debate unfold and remain in limbo in the U.S. While I feel stronger gun regulation should be enacted quickly, I also understand the importance of balancing

individual rights as part of that regulation. Because of the structural and cultural nature of the problem, I feel gun violence in the United States should be met with a coordinated and persistent approach from citizens, activists, political and faith leaders, law enforcement, educators, and conflict resolution practitioners and theorists. MFOL has broken the inertia surrounding this issue after an awful decade of shootings in elementary and high schools, concerts and public events, military bases, theaters, churches, and homes throughout the country. As a parent, citizen, and researcher, I feel it is time for action, which will balance rights and liberties with safety and security for all citizens. Reducing the gun deaths by just five percent would cause thousands of lives to be saved, millions of dollars saved, and foster an improvement in the quality of lives of millions of Americans. In addition, America's reputation abroad would see marked improvement if concrete action could be taken on this issue. A change in policy would align us with most industrialized nations on the planet. This set of assumptions is one I must acknowledge and remember throughout this study. As an aspiring practitioner of conflict transformation, I need to build skills when approaching a controversial issue with a sense of fair-mindedness and intellectual empathy.

De-limitation

A de-limitation of this study is that sample size was limited and that the participants were predominantly from a single geographic area, suburban Philadelphia, with one exception. The participants may not represent the perceptions and attitudes of all protesters in MFOL. An opportunity for future research is to expand the scope of this study to include a broader range of protesters in MFOL and other social movements.

Limitations

There are two limitations to this study. First, I will be interviewed participants active in the MFOL movement nearly two years ago. Relying on memory may have limited their ability to accurately account for perceptions, points of view, and identities of the protesters. Second, political, social, and cultural currents alter how people think about issues like gun violence and movements like MFOL. The awful realities of gun violence seem to recede when there are not high-profile mass shootings reported by the American media. Although gun violence is a daily part of life in the U.S., people tend not to think of it until it happens in a noticeable way. The 'trending' of issues may limit my work since people might have little to say if a high-profile shooting has not occurred within recent memory. This is especially true during the year-long isolation that occurred during the Covid-19 global pandemic. While isolated, the opportunity for mass shootings diminished, especially in schools and universities across the United States.

Conclusion

This chapter summarized my dissertation. I covered the context of the problem under review, the problem statement, the purpose of this study, the research questions, the three theoretical approaches, an overview of the research design, possible scholarly and practical contributions, definitions of key terms used in the study, and key assumptions, de-limitations, and limitations of the study.

These chapters will round out this study: Chapter II is a comprehensive review of literature on protester identity, the culturist/social constructivist perspective, frame theory, structural violence, and social movements. In Chapter III, the topics discussed include the research design and specific details of how the study was conducted. Chapter IV presents the results of the interviews with protesters conducted for this study. Chapter V analyzes those

interviews. In addition, Chapter V presents an interpretation of the results, connects the results to

the research questions, and places the results in the gaps identified by this study. The chapter

ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and some recommendations for action.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative narrative analysis was to explore with ten MFOL protesters their perceptions of how participating in this movement contributed to the development of their identity. Whether protesters have the sense of self (identity), political consciousness, and the commitment to engage in this movement over the long term to realize legislative action and reform of existing gun laws is a key consideration of this dissertation. The change this movement is advocating for is legislative but this change also requires a social and cultural shift new to American society. To carry out this study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of the current literature. This review was ongoing throughout the data collection, data analysis, and synthesis phases of the study.

This review explored the interconnectedness of identity, social constructivism (Or the Culturist perspective), frame theory, structural and cultural violence, protester identity, and social movements generally. Studying MFOL protester perceptions has value because of the necessity for this movement to build capacity over the long term. Change in policy or culture will not happen overnight and, for change to occur, long-term pressure in the form of protest and civil disobedience is crucial. In my opinion, for this movement to affect change, it will need a sustained campaign similar to the civil rights movement in post-World War II America. By uncovering and articulating individual protester voices, researchers can better understand how social movements are studied, the perceptions of protesters during their participation in the movement, and how their identity is changed after their participation in the movement. There is also a large gap in how the MFOL movement is studied generally, probably because of the newness of the movement or perhaps because of the controversial nature of mass shootings, gun control legislation, and gun rights. This study can provide much needed information and new

ways of thinking for the conflict resolution practitioner, organizers and managers of social movements, and for people involved in protest movements outside of the United States. Finally, I hope to add to the conversation of how to address and change cultural and structural violence in American society. By paying attention to the perspectives of individuals who marched in the hallways and streets, helpful data was uncovered that can aid in recruiting, motivating, and connecting the next generation of protesters who can continue working to change American gun culture for the better.

This literature review contains the following six sections: First, I will cover how I conducted my research, including the strategy and databases utilized. Second, I will cover studies related to identity, attitude, and motivation of protesters. Third, I will examine the paradigmatic movements that lead to the Culturist or Social Constructivist perspective that makes up one of the theoretical perspectives in this study. Fourth, I will discuss framing theory, another theoretical foundation of this study. I will discuss the literature on frame theory generally first and then in the context of identity and social movements. Fifth, I will I will place the last theoretical foundation of this study, Galtung's theories of structural and cultural violence in the context of social movements. Sixth, examine the major historical approaches to social movements review the literature to show how social movements are studied.

<div align="center">**Search Strategy**</div>

Extensive research was conducted to prepare for this project. The search strategy started with establishing a literature review outline, which guided the keywords used to search databases. Keywords included, but were not limited to: *protest, protester, protests, activist, activists, protester attitudes and motivations, identity, protester identity, social movement organizations, nonviolent social movements (NSM), March for Our Lives (MFOL), social*

movement networks, perceptions or attitudes of protesters, perceptions or attitudes of social

movements, framing theory, framing theory and NSM, content analysis and newspaper coverage

of protests, structural violence, cultural violence, and *social networks.*

The following databases and library resources were utilized to prepare for this literature

review: ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, ProQuest One Academic, ERIC, PsycInfo,

PAIS Index, CIAO (Columbia International Affairs Online), Sociological Abstracts, Social

Theory, Social Science Database, SAGE Journals Online, SAGE Research Methods Online, The

Qualitative Report (TQR), EBSCO Host, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Academic

Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Directory of Open Access Journals, Health Source

Nursing/Academic Edition, JSTOR, Nexis Uni, Newspaper Source, Opposing Viewpoints in

Context, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, Regional Business News, Religion and

Philosophy Collection. In addition, I conducted a search for research and information within

NSU Works and the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Department of Conflict

Resolution Theses and Dissertations. Sources of information included peer-reviewed journal

articles, books, newspapers and magazines, and theses and dissertations. Over 150 sources,

dating from the 1970s to the present, were identified with material. The majority were published

within the last 10 years.

Older sources were included to provide a sense of context and perspective about social

movements and protesters that participate in those movements. The contributions of this

literature to the field shows how diverse, rich, and dynamic the field of social movements and

social activism is in 2019-2020. There is a need for ongoing qualitative research especially at the

organizer and protester levels. Much of the literature looks at movements and portrayals through

media such as newspapers. The focus of such studies is not on the movements themselves but

directed towards reporters, journalists, editors, managers, or on outcomes in terms of voting

trends, perceptions of the public, etc. There is a gap for looking at newer media such as social

media platforms and how they might affect organizing, messaging, retention, and framing. The

advantage and disadvantage facing social movements is their de-centralized structure. Given that

de-centralized, non-traditional organizational structure, it is even more crucial they understand

the perspectives of the regular member/protester if they are going to effectively frame messages

that persuade and motivate outside and inside the organization.

The overall strengths of this literature review include its variety of approaches –

theoretically and methodologically – that could be taken when examining social movements and

social activism. In relation to messaging and effectiveness, framing theory was frequently

utilized as a framework to examine communication directed outside the movement. Thematic

and structural narrative analysis was the methodology used to examine effectiveness of

messaging (framing). Furthermore, interviews were the most frequently used forms of data

gathering in the studies I looked at. Finally, a strength of this literature was that social

movements such as immigration, gun control, gender, and the environment were used to frame

the research on framing and perception. There is much work to be done in this vibrant field. The

overall weaknesses of this reviewed literature were that it did not focus on protesters specifically,

did not focus on young protesters, and it did not focus on new media platforms as a way of

communicating. The following section will provide a brief summary of how protester identity,

attitude, and motivation have been studied thus far.

Identity, Attitude, and Motivation of Protesters and Activists

A vast universe of research exists for identity, attitude, and motivation as it relates to

social movements. The following section contains a survey of the literature over the last five

years, generally. Sometimes, key studies were included to illustrate ideas and concepts central to my project. This section focuses on the research conducted regarding identity, attitude, and motivation of protesters and will provide a bridge into the culturist perspective and social constructivist work of Touraine and Melucci.

Identity is defined as "the social use of cultural markers to claim, achieve, or ascribe group membership" (Black, 2003, p. 120). These 'cultural markers' include ethnicity, race, gender, religion, class, kinship, nationalism, and caste, just to name a few. This distinction between 'us' and 'them' is a universal amongst humans and central to conflict as well as the analysis and resolution of conflict. The study of gun violence, gun ownership, and protesters advocating for greater gun control legislation are wrapped up in identity.

Jandt (2018, pp. 4-8) also identifies six regulators of social life and identity including religion, national identity, class, gender, race and skin color, and civilization. Jasper (2014, p. 50) defines collective identities as a carrier of meaning, along with maxims, proverbs, jokes, slogans, chants, characters, narratives, facts, rules and laws, and ideologies. Jasper defines collective identities as "when we come to feel part of a group, cognitively, emotionally, and morally, and are willing to take action on its behalf" (p. 50).

Most contemporary studies of identity use the theoretical frameworks set forth by Erik Erikson, who used the concept of an "identity crisis to capture the sense of ambivalence and confusion adolescents experience as they struggle to answer existential questions about meaning and purpose" (Berzonsky, 2018, p. 1). James Marcia extended the work of Erikson to identify four identity types or statuses: "Achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion" (Berzonsky, 2018, p. 1). These four identity statuses will be expanded upon later in this study. Berzonsky (2018) developed a variety of approaches that one may undertake when forming

identity including a process approach to identity, an informational processing style, a normative identity-processing style, a diffuse-avoidant identity processing style, and of specific interest to this study, a value orientation and civic engagement style. As a result of a convergence of trends ranging from expanded "access to educational opportunities, accelerating cultural and technological changes, a widespread questioning of religious values" (Berzonsky, 2018, p. 5) adolescents have begun to rely less and less on religious and institutional values to explore self-identity. This value orientation style and civic engagement style is of specific interest to this study. How adolescents in MFOL proceed in this task provides an important identity domain this study will explore. Hall (2018) describes the ongoing debates and discussions that consider the interpersonal and ideological identity domain. This study considers the overlap between the interpersonal and ideological important and wishes to explore this domain in more detail with the hopes of articulating how politicized identities might become while participating in nonviolent social movements such as MFOL. Can this participation in protest and formation of a politicized identity lead to greater personal political salience that leads to increased participation in the long term?

The definitions provided of identity and collective identity relate to this study because they consistently frame the markers and regulators we connect over while socially constructing our identities. This provides us with the framework to analyze, understand, and ultimately resolve the conflict at hand. As Black (2003, p. 123) states: "Conflict resolution rests, inescapably, on conflict analysis, either implicit or explicit. Analysis, in turn requires concepts and vocabulary. The question therefore arises: How should we understand the words used to name different forms of social identity?" (p. 123). This question continues to guide my study.

The social construct of identity has also been studied in the context of specific cultures such as in Confucian societies such as China (Yuan & Ngai, 2018), among Palestinian citizens of Israel (Baum, 2010), among Muslim women in mosques in the United Kingdom (Brown, 2008), among American adolescents of Arab descent (Khouri, 2016), indigenous adolescents in Far North Russia (Flotskaya, Bulanova, Ponomareva, Flotskiy, & Konopleva, 2019), as well as in a Latin American context (Tapia, Rojas, & Picado, 2017).

Everbach (2017) provides an excellent example of how we might understand the words used to name the social construction of gender, perception, and identity through the influence media coverage. Her examination of the aforementioned ideas is shown with media coverage of Monica Lewinsky in 1998 at the height of the Clinton impeachment. Her study illustrated the intersection of gender identity, perception and stereotypes that were used to vilify Lewinsky for her role in the scandal that led to the impeachment of Bill Clinton.

Simon and Brooks (2015) also note another example of identity construction and management through a mediated lens. Finally, T. Billard (2016) examines transgenderism and representations of transgender people in newspapers within the United States. Billard (2016) demonstrates how trans people are kept in a sphere of deviance in newspaper portrayals by using nine legitimacy indicators as outlined by the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. Legitimacy is of special interest to my study. Young people, especially non-voting age young people are frequently marginalized and de-legitimatized by not only mainstream media but by parents and other authority figures. While these articles concentrated on media portrayals and perceptions, they relate to my study because they are illustrative of the phenomenon of how identity is framed, constructed and maintained by individuals and the media. This intersection and alignment of identity markers, their constructs and perceptions in relation to social

movements particularly interests my research. In the following section, I will present a survey of the literature related to protesters, social movement, identity, attitude, and motivation.

Protesters, identity, and social movements have also been examined from a variety of perspectives. For example, Tim Nicholas Ruhlig (2017) conducted interviews with protesters part of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong to reveal identity markers such as localism, age, language, and political leanings (radicals, moderates) of the protesters. Beyond identity, Ruhlig's (2017) interviews mapped the socio-economic and the institutional issues plaguing Hong Kong during the waves of protests in 2014. Ruhlig's work demonstrates the value of interviews to reveal cleavages and how they manifest themselves in protester identities and actions. Lee (2014) looks at the protests in Hong Kong and focuses not only on what triggers protests but also how protests are portrayed in mainstream media. He studied how newspapers use the protest paradigm – "emphasis on violence and disruption, inclusion of the protesters' voices, and quotation of sources that explicitly criticize or praise the protests or protesters" (Lee, 2014, p. 2729). These studies are relevant because of the connection to perceptions external to the movement and how they shape protester perceptions of themselves.

Hank Johnston (2019) examines the cognitive dimension while zooming in on the identity regulator of age and determined factors relevant to youthful participation such as identity search, risk taking, emotionality, and cognitive triggering. His study is framed by the Occupy Wall Street protests, Gezi Park in Istanbul, and the Black Lives Matter protests in the U.S. Young people drove all of these protests, much like the MFOL protests.

Mukherjee (2015) looks at the benefits and disadvantages of collective identity as it relates to a movement creating a message along with a political identity. While the Occupy movement created a repertoire of slogans and practices referring to 'the 99%', the decentralized,

libertarian, and anarchist perspective blurred the movement's message to the public. Mukherjee (2015) makes an interesting argument about "Catnetness"; Cat = category or the extent to which participants belong to the same social categories and Net = network or the density of group relationships. He argues the movement had plenty of deep group relationships but not enough similarities across social categories.

Education segregation is central in McVeigh, Beyerlein, Vann, and Trivedi (2014) study of residential segregation, education level, and support for the Tea Party movement. Education level and residence were interesting identity markers not frequently studied and I thought the connection to Tea Party support was an excellent bridge by the authors. Further, this study interestingly used county-level data in a quantitative look at identity formation and management. The authors found that "the Tea Party is more likely to take root in counties where the wealthiest families (i.e. families with greater than $200,000 in household income) are integrated into the community (2014, p. 640).

Uluğ and Acar (2018) used the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul to examine multi-level change (individual, group, and system or policy) in Turkish society. While providing a clear context for the protests in Gezi Park and a good mapping of individual and group identity, they gathered data primarily by interviewing experts rather than the groups of protesters they identified with, such as LGBTQ, Kurds, feminists, and Alevis. The results showed that unless sustained pressure is applied, individual, group, and system changes that may have occurred, quickly diminish after the protest.

Identity narratives and the role social movements have in helping to build those narratives is the focus of Oyakawa's (2015) study of a faith-based community organization. She drew on interviews, observation, and archival data to study how both personal experiences and

political beliefs are politicized and how that politicization motivates sustained activism. Biography or personal narrative is crucial to an individual's commitment to a social movement. This study demonstrated a clear methodology, showing how movements that help craft personal narratives can be more vibrant and engage with their members.

Looking at a movement from a political and economic perspective that bridges into self-perception, identity, and framing, Evans (2018) addresses and maps how ideas perpetuate inequality, how those ideas impact self-perceptions and internalize stereotypes, and how they lead to unquestioned acceptance of the status quo. While the perspective is more global (with more focus on Latin America and Caribbean nations) than local, Evans (2018) touches on the positive impact social movements have had on these countries. This study helps illustrate the variety of ways identity and self-perception can connect to social movements advocating for change in a region.

In a study of racial identity in the United States, social networks, and connection to a movement and institution, Jones (2017) examines how Black student leaders challenge inequitable policies at a predominantly white institution (PWI) through individual and collective efforts. Again, the themes of student activism, identity, and social networks to address injustice directly locked in to my project.

Bridging into mediated communication, Fominaya (2015) examines the relationship between face-to-face and online communication and how it impacts the collective identity, sustainability, and internal dynamics of social movements. Her focus is on reinforcement e-mails meant to maintain and build on ties of activists who already meet face-to-face. Much like identity and motivation, my study will probably touch on mediated communication and how it helped –

or not – to connect, support, and motivate protesters in MFOL. Even though it is not a direct concern, I am certain it will emerge as a central issue, given the age of the protesters in my study.

In a shift away from the mediated side of communication but still focused on collective identities, Flesher-Fominaya (2015) examines a paradox in the rejection of identitarian politics and the refusal to self-identify. Especially prevalent in the anti-globalization movement, movements that identify by not identifying are becoming more common. Although more anarchist in nature, this study reveals important complexities related to identification, from both a practical level and a theoretical level.

Finally, another relevant subject area to students and protesters today is social media. While my focus is primarily on perception, identity and perspective, I plan to explore the level of connectedness between protesters and their movement. Lev-On (2018) examined the role of Facebook with regard to protests in 2011 in Israel. Interestingly, he used interviews with 31 individuals involved in the protests and found that while social media assisted in organizing the protests, mainstream media coverage was needed to build public awareness, support, and legitimacy. Using the debate surrounding the NFL protests of police violence, O. Johnson, Hall-Phillips, Chung, and Cho (2019) examined tweets and hashtags to gauge the connection between lifestyle and political consumerism.

This section illustrated the wide variety of studies that have explored protester identity, attitude, and motivation. In the following section, I will examine the three main paradigms used to examine social movements, including the Culturist Perspective and Frame Theory.

Paradigmatic Approaches to Social Movements

The three main paradigms that have emerged to examine social movements over the last 50 years include resource mobilization theory, the political process approach, and frame theory

(Goodwin & Jasper, 2015, p. 640). Stammers (2015) extended this "American approach", also known as the Functionalist Approach, to include what he called "European Approaches" based on the work of Touraine and Melucci. These European approaches brought issues of history and identity into sharper focus. I will briefly describe each paradigm and discuss how my study is positioned within the context of frame theory and the historicity approach of Touraine along with the instrumental and expressive approach articulated by Melucci.

These new perspectives and approaches frame the work I am doing for this project. Where previous research and thinking on social movements saw them as dysfunctions of society or even something to be avoided, current thinking sees social movements as a normal part of politics and societal functioning. I will now discuss each theory that makes up this new paradigm of theory.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource Mobilization Theory was the first new perspective that emerged around social movements of the 1960s. This perspective focused on the formal organizations and networks that emerged as part of social movements. A prerequisite for organizations to survive and thrive is the availability of resources, including money. The primary focus of this perspective was organizational with special attention paid to organizers and managers and how they raised funds. This paradigm grew as social movements grew and helped bring the modern, formal social movements and lobbying firms into clearer focus (Goodwin & Jasper, 2015). Relevant examples of this functionalist approach can be found in Inata (2019), who used resource mobilization, bargaining theory and organizational infrastructure to look at how competing interests can gain leverage over the other before, during or after protests. Brodkin (2014) applied a resource mobilization perspective to the African-American unionization struggle in the 1960s and a more

recent environmental justice campaign in the Hispanic community, tracing the interplay between unions, employers, and activists struggling to affect social change. It is interesting when social movements are examined and the focus is not primarily on identity markers such as race or gender. The focus of Brodkin's paper was to examine capitalism, incomes, and economic security as it related to the movement's activism.

A study that did connect tactics and goals to vitality and outcomes and used a resource mobilization perspective was conducted by Olzak and Ryo (2007). This study looked at racial-ethnic voluntary organizations in the United States for the years 1955 to 1988. The goal was to assess how movement density, competition, and scarce resources affected diversity within the movement and how that diversity – or lack of diversity – might have affected outcomes such as the movement's goals and tactics.

Monk (2011) examines organizational structures related to the Organics movement and how those structures affect access to financial resources. This study was interesting because it traced the evolution of a mature social movement (Organics) and how parts of that movement succeeded because of its long-term, sustained approach. This approach included the levels of professionalism and formality achieved by the movement along with processes and standard setting. One wonders if MFOL could evolve and mature into a more formal, professional movement or even lobbying organization similar to the National Rifle Association (NRA), the main lobbying arm of gun manufacturers in the United States.

Political Process Approach

How movements emerged is the key focus of the political process approach to examining and understanding social movements. This perspective connects economic, political, and social shifts and how their occurrence opens up space for social movements to emerge (Goodwin &

Jasper, 2015). Much like the resource mobilization approach, this approach concerned itself with the role of governmental, economic, and military elites as they related to social movements. By maintaining a focus on governmental elites or organizers of social movements, theorists were discounting protester perceptions, identities, and connections. A good example of the examination of processes and tactics can be found in Young and Shellman (2019). Bethke and Pinckney (2019) looked at the sub-components of democracy such as the elected executive, the quality of elections (free and fair), freedom of expression, associational autonomy, and inclusive citizenship to draw conclusions about the quality of democracy in a variety of countries. In a study that bridged the gap between political process, framing, and social movements, Branton, Martinez-Ebers, Carey, and Matsubayashi (2015) used the 2006 immigrant rallies to determine whether these protests helped shape public opinion. Using a quantitative approach, they found that exposure to the frequency of protest messages (temporal exposure) and the relative distance to the protests (spatial exposure) greatly influenced policy preferences on immigration. Looking at social movements and political processes in an organizational and functionalist construct, Germain, Robertson, and Minnis (2019) as well as Gupta and Briscoe (2019) brought in issues of ideology, openness, and change in organizational settings. Extending these examples of the functionalist approach in organizational settings, McDaniel, Lown, and Malone (2018) examined corporate social responsibility initiatives and how they shape public and policymaker understandings about tobacco control and the industry. The focus relevant to my paper is the shaping of perceptions and how a variety of audiences might be influenced by a variety of messages around a contentious issue like protesting over gun control. van Troost, Klandermans, and van Stekelenburg (2018) employed a political opportunity approach when focusing on individual protesters to examine how protesters are mobilized in relation to their emotions and

how they are shaped by political context, specifically political alliances. Giugni and Grasso (2019) examined the effect party membership, crises (i.e., high unemployment, low GDP), and contexts with regard to how they open up or close space for mobilization along with the impact they have on protest participation. While the study was qualitative and focused primarily on the European Union, it drew directly from political process theory and practice. Finally, Passarelli and Tuorto (2016) looked at a specific movement--The Five Star Movement in Italy--to examine both the meaning and impact of the rise of this radical newcomer. They distinguished between the system discontent and the elite discontent as it relates to voter power. This study was interesting because of its singular focus and examination of voter motives. Even though my focus is on protesters and their identities, perceptions and motives, I felt the methodology aligned well with my study. The emphasis on the functionalist approach in these studies provides an opportunity for my project since my focus will be on protesters and their perceptions of the movement they are a part of. In the following section, I will briefly discuss 'European' approaches to identity that directly inform the Culturist or Social Constructivist perspective that is one of the theoretical foundations for this study.

European' Approaches to Identity

Touraine

Touraine and Melucci moved American theorists closer to a new view of social movements oriented to "collective identities more than to material redistribution" (Jasper, Tramontano, & McGarry, 2015, p. 26). This focus on identity is central to this research project and I will briefly map out the territory covered by Touraine below.

Perhaps inspired by Galtung and his use of conflict triangles, Touraine drew on the work of Marx, Derkheim, and Weber when he "posited a triad of conditions for a true social

movement, I-O-T." (Jasper et al., 2015, p. 26) 'I' is identity of the movement or who they are and their historical purpose. 'O' is the identity of their opponents. 'T' is the totality, or the stakes of the struggle. Touraine's argument is that a movement must clearly establish all three sides of the I-O-T triangle to be an actual movement. Collective identity and clear sense of purpose helped re-focus sociologists' perspectives on movements for the better.

Touraine's new focus and emphasis on action research and interventions brought about a new Social Action Theory. Scott (1991, p. 38) summarized social action theory:

a) Society is an open system – there are no pre-defined ends towards which it moves. Explanation is context specific, historical, and non-teleological.

b) Social action does not have fully foreseeable outcomes, nor can its content be deduced from social-structural factors such as class location.

c) There is no logic of the system or parts of the system.

d) Specialist knowledge of society has no prior claim to privilege over the interpretations offered by the social actors. (p. 38)

To Touraine and this researcher, context, history, and access are central to understanding the social movements being studied. My focus will be on accessing and describing the context in which individual protesters operated when they participated in MFOL marches in 2018.

The line of thinking established by Touraine led to many advances in sociology. As outlined by Hamel (1998, pp. 16-17), they include the knowledge uncovered, the dimensions of the social system under study, the representation of the individuals and groups under study, and the 'well-constructed' interpretation and explanation of the actors.

Finally, Kerr (1996, p. 66) summarizes the importance of Touraine's work by contrasting his thinking with his American contemporaries:

Many U.S. observers, including myself, tend to think in terms of slow evolutionary

progress; Touraine tends to think more in terms of contrasting stages of history; many

U.S. observers tend to think in terms of individuals; Touraine in terms of classes; many

U.S. observers tend to think in terms of consensus or at least consent, Touraine in terms

of conflict; many U.S. observers tend to think in terms of shades of color, Touraine in

more stark contrasts. (p. 66)

I feel that by shifting my focus towards a Touraine-centric model approach of sociology, I can

approach this new social movement from a fresh perspective. The newness of the MFOL

movement, combined with its youth-oriented demographic, and the nature of the social struggle

(gun control) all lends itself to another approach related to identity. This approach draws out

class, power, conflict, and contrast that will allow participants to re-map their trajectory for the

long-term rather than the short-term.

Melucci

Alberto Melucci was a student of Touraine who added to the conceptual tool kit by

addressing the role collective and individual identities are built and maintained by the social

movements. Melucci's contribution was that "individuals crafted their sense of self in contrast to

the recognized collective identities" (Jasper et al., 2015, p. 27). Further, Melucci's emphasis on

expressive dimensions of social movements helped researchers hone in on the everyday life of

actors and movement activism (Stammers, 2015, p. 110) .

As stated in Vahabzadeh (2001, p. 2), five key concepts guide Melucci's thinking on

identity: First, the collapse of the distinction between the public and private spheres. Second,

because of this collapse, domination is now understood as a fact of everyday life and opposition

to sources of domination appears as deviance and marginality. Third, the struggles for group

autonomy and freedom from political intervention prompt movements to act out their practices largely in the cultural field instead of politics. Fourth, emphasis on group particularity and identity becomes a form of resistance against power in the cultural milieu. Finally, direct participation in action groups is stressed and representational politics is largely abandoned.

These ideas prove prescient and appropriate when we contextualize them in the MFOL movement. For example, as a result of social media, the distinction between public and private spheres has been obliterated. Hashtag movements have been the main drivers of the Arab Spring, Me Too, and MFOL. The opposition to dominance is of special relevance to MFOL. Because of their age, children find themselves as a special class of citizens and might even be marginalized faster because of this expectation in our society. While protesters in the MFOL movement are pushing for political solutions to their grievances, their protests play out largely in the cultural arena of the internet, broadcast media, and social media. Thanks to their operation in the cultural milieu and especially because of the role social media plays in the day-to-day lives of Americans, power and identity are wrapped up in action groups primarily while political processes are secondary. These intersecting areas – movements, identity, culture, and perspective - are exactly the focal points of this study. In the following section, I will present studies that have examined identity, motivation, and attitudes of participants in social movements. As you will see, the gaps that exist in the literature include what I have outlined above with most of the focus on functionalist perspectives and very few studies focusing on individual identity, perspective, and viewpoint as articulated by Touraine and Melucci. The following section will discuss the second theoretical foundation of this study, Frame Theory. First, from a general perspective, then in the context of social movements and identity.

General Frame Theory

Two cultural components form the foundation of this research project and they are also the two "components of movements that have been studied more than others" (Goodwin & Jasper, 2015, p. 6) One is framing theory and the other is building, maintaining, and managing identity. I will define and discuss framing theory in this section and protester identity in the following section.

Hardly a new concept in sociology, frame theory has been widely used to examine social movements, especially over the last 40 years (Ilisanu & Andrei, 2019, p. 5). According to Lynn and Williams (2016, p. 736), frames provide "meaning by guiding individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label situations and events" (p. 736). As I will demonstrate later in this literature review, framing is extensively employed to examine how media frames social movements and how external audiences frame protest movements. However, an examination of frames from an individual protester viewpoint is greatly lacking.

The linguist George Lakoff (2014) brings the social frame down to the individual level and defines frames as "mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As a result, they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as good or bad outcome of our actions" (2014, p. xii). Lakoff (2010) himself uses frame theory to provide an excellent example of the critical urgency of framing messages as they relate to social movements and social change when it comes to the environment. In his study, he not only defines frames but also discusses logical, intellectual, and political traps we may set for ourselves when working with frames. Lakoff's (2010) definition includes "semantic roles, relations between roles, and relations to other frames" (2010, p. 71). Lakoff (2010) ends his paper with simple, practical steps to improve how we frame environmental messages effectively:

- Talk at the level of values and frame issues in terms of moral values.

- Provide a structured understanding of what you are saying.

- Context matters: Be aware of what is going on.

The practical, straightforward nature of Lakoff's work cannot be overstated. The MFOL movement must reconcile itself with framing gun violence so it does not discourage gun owners or people advocating for the Second Amendment. Lakoff points out how to do it in plain, easy to understand terms. Miller (2005) summarizes Lakoff's work with these four points:

1. Every word evokes a frame – every word brings with it related concepts and images.

2. Words defined within the frame evoke the frame.

3. Negating a frame evokes a frame.

4. Evoking the frame reinforces the frame. (pp. 204-205)

This individual frame and how it contrasts with the organization's frame, in this case, the frame of MFOL and how individual protesters perceive it, is the key focus of this study.

Snow (1988, p. 198) calls this linkage of individual "interests, values, and beliefs" with social movement "activities, goals, and ideology" *frame alignment* and identified three parts to this alignment: Diagnostic Framing, Prognostic Framing, Motivational Framing (p. 198). This study aims to go beyond the attribution of causes or assignment of blame (Diagnostic Framing) or predicting what outcomes may occur from mobilization (Prognostic Framing) and explore motives, perspectives, and points of view unique to the protesters in MFOL (Motivational Framing). Even Snow cautioned against looking exclusively at any social movement's framing efforts: "To focus only on the substantive content of the movement's framing efforts, however, runs the risk of creating a picture of frame alignment as an overly mechanistic, non-dialectical process whereby mobilizing ideas are poured into or diffused among a passive, non-suspecting

population" (D. A. Snow, Robert D. Benford, 1988, p. 204). In her dissertation, Ketelaars (2016) examined the frame alignment between demonstrators, social movement organizations, and mass media mostly to draw out why people join social movements across three countries to examine mobilization and demonstration characteristics. I agree with the position of broadening our view of framing efforts articulated by Snow and Ketelaars. The necessity of examining protester frames of reference, perceptions, and motives would be a vital contribution that enhances the conversation on framing and social movements. The following section places framing and identity in the broader concept of social movement research.

Framing, Identity, and Social Movement Research

As this section illustrates, there are a wide variety of approaches to examining framing as it applies to all social movements. This section illustrates the variety of movements examined using frame theory.

More often than not, this examination of frames usually leads to the unintended outcome of connecting into protester identity, not only in terms of frame alignment but also in terms of frame resonance. For example, Esposito- Barry and Romano- Barry (2016) examined not only framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) but also how that frame was co-opted so the conversation on race, policing, and social justice was changed to question the legitimacy of BLMM. This exploration of frame co-option led to a clearer definition of benevolent racism. More important, this study highlights how frames and messaging can easily be co-opted and turned against the movement. There is a dual-edged nature to framing and how framing can negate and de-legitimatize messages and movements.

Another study that demonstrates the overlap between the movement, frames, ideology, and protest outcomes was conducted by Bloemraad, Silva, and Voss (2016). By examining

claims made by protest groups, they studied which frame(s) (rights frames, economic frames, and family frames) most resonated with the general public. Their survey-based, quantitative study revealed the family frame was most likely to sway self-identified conservatives. Perhaps there is a lesson here, not only when considering what a quantitative study might reveal but also how a movement like MFOL might frame their message to sway conservatives who typically support gun ownership.

Contentious political issues are fertile territory for an examination of message framing and the Tea Party movement that sprung up following the 2009 subprime mortgage crisis and recession demonstrates how to approach a challenging subject. Prior (2014) connected organizational structure and hierarchy to ideology with activist frames to examine how messages travel from top to bottom in movements. In an International Communication Association (ICA; 2011) paper, the Tea Party movement was examined for how messages from the movement are framed in mainstream media coverage with the goal being to distinguish between the rhetoric of the movement and how it was actually covered.

Working from a novel, legal perspective McCammon (2012) looked at the U.S. women's jury movement, which occurred in the mid-20th century, and the variety of frames this movement used to push for women to serve on juries. She examined the use of the Difference Frame and The Equality Frame offered by activists and protesters and the processes used when employing each frame. What frame works best to persuade the audience outside the movement is an important consideration for organizers and protesters and reveals itself repeatedly in this literature review. Much like the themes of individual and collective identity that emerge organically, the theme of persuasive messaging - or framing – emerges repeatedly, as we see in the following studies.

Friesen (2014) took a unique approach by examining symbols and use of space by counter-recruitment activists while re-framing U.S. military recruiter messages in public high schools. This study was of special interest since its focus was on public schools, which is where many protesters from MFOL did their work. Resistance was framed around the rendition of information, educational space, countering the heroic military narrative, emphasizing the educational mission of public schools, and countering the vocational vision forwarded by military recruiters. Much like gun ownership and gun violence, schools are contested, politicized spaces that insist on carefully constructed messages that will work to persuade through critical thinking and dialogue.

A final example that illustrates the flexibility of how and what framing can be applied to is by Wozniak, Wessler, and Lück (2016). They specifically focus on visual representations and how those representations influence perceptions on the environment and climate change. Of special relevance and interest to my study: "Through providing powerful pictures and symbolic actions, civil society actors can prevail in the visual framing contest under certain conditions, but it is much harder for them to circumvent the usually strong statist orientation of mainstream news media in sourcing textual messages" (Wozniak et al., 2016, p.1433). This means protesters and organizers need to take a blended approach to their advocacy and messaging. Logistics, space, and time along with the form of media to use before, during, and after the protests all need to be considered to maximize the messages being delivered.

These studies demonstrate the flexibility of framing theory and how it can be employed across a variety of movements while employing a variety of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Research on this construct gave me the confidence in the approach chosen for my study because of the persuasive nature of framing and whether protesters think the messages

employed by MFOL made any difference. The following section discusses the third theoretical foundation of this study, Johan Galtung's Structural and Cultural Violence.

Culture and Violence: Galtung's Structural and Cultural Violence

This research study will align and frame gun violence as a social conflict directly related to structural and cultural violence embedded in the American way of life. By framing gun violence as social conflict, we can approach it with the appropriate analytic lens, examine the root causes of gun violence, and provide direction to transform this conflict so healing may begin at the personal, community, and national levels of our society.

Since I am framing gun violence as social conflict embedded in American culture, a definition of culture is useful. Avruch (2013) draws on Theodore Schwartz's definition of culture, stating that, "culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves" (p. 47). The MFOL movement is aiming to transform American culture by not only changing existing legislations on gun violence but by also altering the culture of guns in the United States. This demands that the movement address the population that owns and uses guns constructively, because culture is socially distributed across a population. In addition, culture is psychologically distributed across a population. This also touches on identity and, in a broader way, perceptions of security that people who own and use guns have. Finally, because culture is connected to past or ongoing social practices, demonstrators, activists, and legislators must construct messages that engage and persuade so it acknowledges these social realities. How the movement engages matter immensely, not only in

terms of length of time but also in terms of the quality of communication used to persuade culturally entrenched beliefs, norms, and practices.

The work of Johan Galtung also undergirds and supports my work in this project. His two seminal articles, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" published in 1969 and "Cultural Violence" published in 1990, act as the guide for my project. I will briefly contextualize them and place them appropriately in my research project. Galtung's definition of violence and negative peace specifically interest my project because gun violence and especially gun ownership is a form of negative peace. Galtung (1969) defined violence as "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is" (J. Galtung, 1969, p. 168). Owning a gun for personal, home, or family security increases the potential for violence. When the potential for violence is higher than the actual, or when violence is avoidable, then violence is present. Gun ownership and gun violence checks many boxes of his typology of violence: it is manifest, physical and psychological, intended and sometimes unintended and with objects. In terms of transforming the conflict at hand, the concepts of positive peace and structural violence are useful tools to frame, analyze, and discuss the violence the MFOL movement is looking to change.

Galtung moves us beyond structural violence and positive/negative peace by introducing Cultural Violence as a concept by stating, "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong" (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). What Galtung is referring to is the legitimacy and power assigned to violence through our institutions. This can be seen in benign, covert ways, such as a television show or movie that depicts violence. Generally, there are acceptable levels of violence individuals, parents, and families are comfortable viewing and even come to expect in all forms of media. As long as that violence aligns with ideological

expectations, it is deemed acceptable by the audience and allowed to continue throughout society. Furthermore, an overt example of cultural violence would be heavily armed police responding to protests in Ferguson, MO as a form of violence that looks and feels right, culturally and ideologically speaking. The militarizing of police forces across the United States is a topic that is finally receiving serious discussion and investigation as a result of the death of George Floyd. However, the militarization of police in the United States has been allowed to happen because on an ideological and cultural level, it feels right, especially to people in power. However, to unarmed protesters or civil libertarians, this issue is deeply concerning.

Of special interest and alignment with my work is how Galtung builds his typology of violence when discussing cultural violence. By focusing on needs, such as survival, well-being, identity, and freedom, his definition of violence was expanded to bring in key components, such as identity, emotion, and an enhanced definition of culture, for social scientists to study for the next thirty years.

Studies that intersect with my research focus and interest include Cremin and Guilherme's (2016) analysis of the rise of violence in schools. Galtung figures prominently in this study. The authors contend there is indirect violence occurring and it is connected with the culture of schooling. They argue that the "project of educating young people for critical awareness has lost out to the project of education for conformity" (Cremin & Guilherme, 2016, p. 1124). Much like my proposed study, the authors support an epistemological shift in schools that enable individuals and communities to achieve peace. Schools are heavily contested spaces, from ideology to interpersonal conflict to conflict in the classroom. This conflict was evident during the MFOL protests and will be a point of analysis for my study. In a shift from schools to labor, identity, and race, Sehlin-MacNeil (2018) examines the power relations between extractive

industries and indigenous groups in Sweden and Australia. Sehlin-MacNeil (2018) employs Galtung's concepts of cultural and structural violence as analytical tools. She also introduces the concepts of "extractive violence (a form of direct violence but relating specifically to extractive violence and indigenous peoples) as a complement to Galtung's model" (Sehlin-MacNeil, 2018, p. 81). Sehlin-MacNeil's (2018) study was interesting and relevant because it demonstrated the flexibility and adaptability of Galtung's theory. Finally, Mullen (2015) argues for making structural and cultural violence central to transitional justice programs. He found that even as transitional justice programs did address violent individuals and events, it left gaps in communities that experienced structural and cultural violence. Comprehensive and thoughtful changes in policy implementation are critical to enacting effective change. As a result, transforming America's gun culture is a perfect parallel to this study.

General Social Movements

This section will review social movements by showing which movements have been analyzed, albeit not for perspectives of identity, perception, or motivation. Rather, this section will illustrate the gap that exists in the literature for analyzing gun violence in the United States. Because of the numerous, high profile shootings over the past decade, there is a spiral of silence on analyzing the structural, cultural, and legislative drivers underneath gun violence. Coverage of social issues, social movements, and conflict in American society receives a great deal of attention by the field of conflict analysis and resolution. For framing, much of the literature focuses on media framing and proposes courses of action for journalists, editors, managers, and even educators. For example, on issues about the environment, much more focus is given to how media outlets and, in particular, newspapers can frame issues. Chand (2017) focuses on journalism in Fiji and how climate change is covered. The process of hydraulic fracturing or

'fracking' is covered by Hedding (2017) through the analysis of coverage from three newspapers in three states between 2008 – 2013. Finally, Watson (2014) looks at the journalistic routine of sources during disasters with emphasis on the BP Gulf of Mexico spill of 2010. Related to environmental coverage with emphasis on Boko Haram activities and environmental impact, Nwabueze and Ekwughe (2014) used three Nigerian newspapers to analyze content related to how the environment was discussed in relation to terrorist activities. This is a perfect illustration of social issues or movements related to the environment and how they were analyzed over the previous decade. Similar approaches were taken in covering the tobacco industry (McDaniel et al., 2018), sex trafficking in Thailand (Sobel, 2016), news coverage of immigration and linguistic bias (Mastro, Tukachinsky, Behm-Morawitz, & Blecha, 2014), and even health-related issues such as Zika (Squiers et al., 2019), and seasonal flu (Meyer et al., 2016). There were two gun violence and shootings related articles and neither examined protest, identity or even the movement advocating for greater changes to gun control legislation. Cassidy, LaFrance, and Babin (2018) analyzed national newspaper coverage of the 2015 mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC to examine not only media frames but reporter routines when covering shootings. Friedman et al. (2019) conducted an ethnographic and epidemiological study of firearm violence in Philadelphia's Puerto Rican neighborhoods. This historical account of social movements shows the gap in the literature my study hopes to fill. Studies related to gun violence and social movements are much needed in conflict analysis and resolution. At a minimum, I am hoping to shed light on what opportunities exist for analysts and practitioners at the local, state, and federal level to help transform the conflicts that result in gun violence. Related to MFOL, the opportunity exists to help build capacity so the movement

can continue to exert social, political, and cultural pressure so the barrier of apathy can be broken and common-sense gun control can begin.

These studies reinforce the necessity of comprehensive, transformative approaches within the field of conflict analysis and resolution as it relates to protest movements and the protesters themselves. How we frame conflict, culture, identity, emotion, and motivations and how they connect people within a movement are areas worthy of investigation because ultimately, these frames influence how people then engage with the broader society when attempting to advocate for change. Do we attempt to advocate for change through dialogue or through coercion? This is just one of numerous questions and issues that may be lost when caught up in the fog of noisy and sometimes violent protest. Furthermore, it is an issue that is also lost in the numerous narratives that emerge when protests are covered as part of the daily news cycle. My study hopes to address these issues and provides a road map for future directions the MFOL movement can take towards conflict transformation.

Summary

Because of conducting this literature review, four gaps were revealed that my study aims to fill. These gaps were also considered in the context of the central question for this study: Whether protesters have the sense of self (identity), political consciousness, and the commitment to engage in this movement over the long term to realize legislative action and reform of existing gun laws. The gaps identified by the literature review will be considered in light of this central question.

As you will see, four common gaps emerge that my study intends to fill. First, many of these studies conducted data gathering by using secondary sources such as news accounts, legal documents, or media analysis. This approach forced researchers into a position of viewing the

movement from a far-removed distance. My study will address this gap by interviewing protesters directly about their experiences with MFOL. By interviewing a variety of protesters from the MFOL movement, my study will close this gap and help foster a new dialogue about this emerging movement in American society. The work of the MFOL and the gun control and violence mitigation movement can be aligned with other movements that attempted to foster change in a deeply entrenched American society. The Civil Rights movement that emerged in post-World War II America is one example of sustained and ongoing pressure to foster legislative and cultural change. Other relevant examples include the multiple waves of feminism that contributed to ongoing change over the last 120 years. Finally, the environmental movement that has grown and matured over the last fifty years is yet another example of sustained protest and pressure on political leaders. All of these movements had to maintain a consistent presence in American society and apply pressure at the cultural, social, and political realms while continuing hard work in a challenging environment. Given the levels of structural and cultural violence connected with gun ownership, MFOL and the gun control movement has a long-term fight on its hands. This presents the conflict resolution specialist with numerous points to transform and re-shape the conflict at hand. These opportunities include: Analyzing the structures of the movements, working to create opportunities that contribute to shaping perspectives, contributing to dialogues, and fostering healing in individuals, families, and communities affected by gun violence.

Second, often, the intended audiences for the vast majority of research were journalists, editors, managers, or other journalism professors. My intended audience will be organizers, protesters, and practitioners within the peace movement. My literature review revealed a gap that my study hopes to fill and seed a conversation that will grow so our field can contribute to a

devastating social problem and an embedded form of violence at the heart of American identity and character. In relation to the central question, the long-term commitment needed for sustained pressure leading to legislative change by the MFOL movement is clear. In order for the movement to work as both a protest movement and, eventually, as a political action movement, it will need committed, engaged, and knowledgeable activists at multiple levels of our society. Exploring identity formation as it relates to motivation and commitment to transforming an entrenched social problem is a necessary gap to fill.

Third, in the vast majority of these studies, frames were focused on perceptions more than identity. While perceptions of journalists, editors, or the general public is important, I am looking to find the identities formed along with the connections made between protesters in a particular movement. These relational dynamics exist within the movement as well as outside the movement. From international movements to local movements, identity matters to the protesters, the movement's organizers, to people on 'the other side' of the movement, and to the general public. Identity markers help set the stage for messaging that flows inside the movement and to the general public. By mapping protester identity in the MFOL movement as it relates to the central question, I will add identity markers such as age, power, relational connection, and perceptions to the conversation. As my literature review reveals, these social movements are niche movements that deserve study almost in the manner of unique individuals.

Fourth, research and studies on MFOL were negligible. This may be due to the newness of the movement and the media saturation coverage while the protests were happening. While movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, Arab Spring Protests and protests in Hong Kong received coverage in the literature, MFOL or #Neveragain were at a minimum. Within the context of the central question, issues such as identity, sense of self, political

consciousness, and motivation all connect into these larger constructs of commitment to change and the relationships that form within social movements. Ultimately, messaging matters, especially when movements are framing issues and hoping to persuade people to not only join the movement but to change the minds of the people 'on the other side' of the movement. Movements have to be agile, responsive to rapid environmental shifts, and find creative ways to mobilize people that can carry a message to multiple audiences. By examining protester perceptions of messaging and movement, we can contribute to a qualitative conversation about framing.

There are multiple layers to what my project hopes to reveal. First, by conducting structured and semi-structured interviews with protesters who marched with MFOL, I hope to uncover their perceptions about their identity, including perspectives on age, relational dynamics, and connections to fellow protesters. I hope to also discover perceptions they have about the movement they participated in. By examining perceptions held about MFOL, I can then analyze message effectiveness and framing that can help raise awareness about how social movements can position themselves for long-term viability and influence counter protesters, the public, and elected policy makers with the ultimate goal of building capacity for long-term viability and success.

Given the gaps identified above, along with the central question of whether protesters have the sense of self (identity), the political consciousness, and commitment to engage in this movement over the long term, and the purpose of this study, I propose the following five research questions:

RQ1: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement? This question directly investigates identity formation and the role MFOL played in engaging and changing a protester's sense of self.

RQ 2: How did protesters view the MFOL movement? The question explores identity formation as it relates to protester perceptions and identity formation. Since a large part of identity formation is built in relation to how we see ourselves and others, this question is relevant and important.

RQ3: What motivated them to join the MFOL movement? By identifying factors that influenced motivation to take part in protests, especially new, first time protesters, this question relates directly to the central question of the study.

RQ4: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they marched, and after marches? This research question is aligned with the central question because it explores not only the relationships formed within the movement between protesters but also the relationship built between the protester and the movement itself. This question is relevant to the formation of identity and formation of a political consciousness.

RQ5: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement? This question touches on all of the aspects articulated in the central question. Sense of self (Identity), political consciousness, and commitment are all components of self and of relationships formed within relation to 'other', in this case, people who are outside of the movement or even hostile to the movement.

In chapter III, I will summarize the methodology employed for this study including a description of the participants and how they were selected, ethical challenges, considerations, and how they were addressed, the interview procedure, and how interview data was analyzed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This qualitative narrative analysis focused primarily on protester attitudes and perceptions as they relate to the nonviolent social movement (NSM) they are participating in while attempting to effect a change in policy and culture. I analyzed protester perceptions within the March for Our Lives (MFOL) movement and examined how their identity was influenced by participation and what motivated them to join this movement. The main target for analysis was the protesters but given this project, inevitably, the MFOL movement becomes part of the study, since protesters were being asked how their identity connected them to the movement and how their identity was enhanced or diminished because of their participation in the movement.

Given that individual identity and the movement are bound, in-depth, semi-structured interviews explored these perceptions protesters held and still may hold to this day. The central question for this study was whether protesters have the sense of self (Identity), the political consciousness, and the commitment to engage in this movement over the long term. Practitioners, scholars, and organizers gain insight into motives, messaging, and issue framing that may lead to a transformation of this entrenched conflict. While specific protest strategies and tactics were not a central concern, suggestions and perspectives offered by protesters provide a possible roadmap for dialogue to help transform gun violence that plagues American society. Many protesters articulated the need for more civil discourse between conflicting parties and the need to reduce tensions when discussing this difficult issue in person and online.

My research for this project was grounded in the constructed or constructivist approach since I was interested in examining, understanding, and building knowledge about how subjects understand their own actions and circumstances. With relevance to my study, I was keen to

discover how protesters understood how their identity developed or how it was enhanced by their participation in the MFOL movement. By exploring this phenomenon of identity formation and development with an individual close to or at this formative threshold, I felt there is a need to explore this issue to uncover how their sense of self (Identity) was formed and connected to formation of a political consciousness, motivation, and commitment. By studying the linkage of this individual construct to larger movements (Gun control protests, political protest groups, community, state and national structures) might yield new information and ideas as to how to discuss, dialogue, or even resolve gun violence in the United States.

In that spirit, I approached that individual understanding by employing a thematic and structural analysis of the stories or narratives protesters had while participating in the MFOL movement. This narrative turn allowed individuals to, as stated in Riessman (2008), "to excavate and reassess memories that may have been fragmented, chaotic, unbearable, and/or scarcely visible before narrating them". The vehicle employed to gather that narrative data was one on one interviews. Interviewing participants in the movement was the best mechanism to uncover this idiosyncratic and purposefully constructed knowledge and will allow the connections be revealed naturally.

Mosley (2013) distinguishes between the positivist and interpretivist/constructivist approach by arguing the positivist should aim to identify patterns of cause and effect so the researcher can develop falsifiable hypotheses and test them empirically. But the interpretivist/constructivist treats the world as socially made and that knowledge is impossible to separate from historical context and power relationships. In Krauss (2005):

> [T]here are multiple realities constructed by humans who experience a phenomenon of interest. People impose order on the world perceived in an effort to construct meaning;

meaning lies in cognition not in elements external to us; information impinging on our

cognitive systems is screened, translated, altered, perhaps rejected by the knowledge that

already exists in that system; the resulting knowledge is idiosyncratic and is purposefully

constructed. (p. 760)

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the methodology employed to excavate that

idiosyncratic and purposefully constructed knowledge by discussing the following four areas:

First, describe the participants in the study. Second, discuss the ethical challenges this study

posed and how they were resolved. Third, outline the interview procedure used to gather data

from participants. Fourth, lay out the entire data analysis procedure utilized in this dissertation.

Description of Participants

The population for this study were students who participated in MFOL protests at their

schools in March 2018. At the time of the interview, all participants were over the age of 18 and

college students at various institutions throughout the United States. The majority of

interviewees attended school and protested primarily at school districts in Bucks Co. which is in

suburban Philadelphia. One of the school districts – Pennridge – garnered national attention for

their protest activity during in school detentions following the walk-out protests coordinated with

MFOL at the national level. The Pennridge 225 (225 were the number of students penalized with

detention) were supported through social media campaigns by protesters at Marjorie Stoneman

Douglas (MSD) high school and well-known Hollywood celebrities such as Julianne Moore,

who wrote a letter of support to the high school principal of Pennridge. Following their protests

and detention, the organizers of Pennridge 225 were invited to meet and march with survivors of

the MSD shooting at the national protest in Washington D.C. held later in 2018. A sample size of

ten interviewees is not representative, especially given they are mostly from Bucks Co. However,

given their unique experiences and there were significant differences in how protests were approved, sanctioned, and carried out between the different school districts within Bucks Co. the narratives they provided for this study gave valuable insights for analysis.

On another level, this population was chosen with four key reasons in mind. First, because of the problem of gun violence in the United States – structurally embedded, politically mandated and supported, culturally communicated, and wrapped up in constructs, such as gender, power, and identity – protesters from MFOL face a long-term, uphill battle. Due to these factors, this case provided an excellent opportunity to add to the concepts of structural and cultural violence. Second, because of their age, protesters from MFOL faced questions of legitimacy and maturity. 'Better seen than heard' has been a common rejoinder to young people taking a stand on issues they feel previous generations have failed to deal with. From conspiracy theories charging protesters as being 'crisis actors' or not actually present during the shooting at their school, to comments about their appearance, and even their cognitive state, young protesters in the age of social media are faced with a constant barrage of negative messaging. How they handle that messaging and support one another while staying true to the movement specially interested me. The relational dynamics at play here deserve further exploration. Third, somewhat related to their age but more related to political clout and power, these protesters specially interested me because many lacked the power to vote while they were protesting. Politically speaking, protesters under the age of 18 have little to no stake in American political life; yet, they took a stand to persuade politicians, such as Donald Trump and Senator Marco Rubio, that they should take up the cause of reforming gun laws. Both Trump and Rubio have both publicly endorsed pro-NRA policies with the latter earning an A+ grade for his robust support of the 2nd Amendment. Whether or not policy is affected is something no one can predict. For now, it

seems like political leaders are taking a short-term view and no major legislation is likely to happen before the 2020 presidential election. However, the fact that young people took this stand and utilized nonviolent civil disobedience speaks volumes of their bravery, dedication, and intelligence. Finally, and somewhat related to the previous point, this population was of special interest because, beyond lacking political clout, these student protesters took a real risk in protesting. In the weeks following the major MFOL protests in March of 2018, students all around the country continued to protest at their schools. Many organized walk outs weekly. Sometimes, the walkouts were endorsed by school administrators who assisted in maintaining order, security, and safety so students could voice their grievances and demands. Where walkouts were not endorsed or allowed, students took a real risk to walkout. Sometimes, students had to take a calculated risk and be suspended or expelled and have a permanent mark on their school record. Despite those penalties, many students still protested. Beyond school, many students faced being ostracized by family and friends for their views on gun ownership and gun violence. These dynamics of power, risk, and relationships at school and at home deserve to be uncovered and examined to better understand what is really at the heart of this movement. In the next section, I will discuss and justify the sampling strategy for this population.

Morris (2015) identifies four steps for finding interviewees. They include: establishing who to interview, considering the characteristics and geographical location of interviewees, determining information sources, finding related information, and contacting organizations, groups, and individuals who can facilitate access. I recruited interviewees from former students in my classes on a volunteer basis and utilized snowball sampling to build an additional group of interviewees. Access and coordination of schedules was the most challenging barrier to completing the interview process.

After I found an initial group of participants, I determined if they met the minimum criteria of having participated and marched in any MFOL protest during the winter and spring of 2018. Given the interviews (in-depth and at least 60 minutes with possible follow-up interviews), the research goals, and numerous research questions for this study, a sample size of ten interviewees worked best for this study. When considering that the project should have interviewees discuss perspectives and perceptions related to identity and the MFOL movement, saturation occurred quickly because I was dealing with subjective experiences and accounting for 'how and why' types of validation. To maintain health and safety protocols during Covid-19, interviews were conducted via the online meeting platform known as Zoom. In this section, I discussed my participant selection logic as it relates to the methodology for my study.

Ethical Considerations and Procedures

This section of this chapter will address ethical procedures as they relate to agreements to gain access to participants or data, a description of the treatment of human participants, whether data are anonymous or confidential, and any other ethical issues that might apply to this study.

On October 1, 2019, I completed the CITI course for Social and Behavioral researchers as required by Nova Southeastern University. Ethics are a central concern and the principles of respect for persons, justice, and beneficence are woven into my research practices. On October 19, 2020, I received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Nova Southeastern University to conduct data collection for my study.

Data collected in interviews were made anonymous and reported so the identities of the interviewees were not disclosed. Pseudonyms were used in place of actual names and the only identifying factors revealed are age, gender, and educational level (freshman, sophomore, etc.). Interview videos, coding sheets, and all associated data were electronically stored on my

password secured laptop dedicated for employment. In addition, videos and all associated data were stored on a USB drive and on a secure cloud storage account in Dropbox.com. Except for the USB, devices and cloud storage are password protected and can only be accessed by me. I will store this data for at least two years before deleting it from personal devices and accounts.

My role in this study was that of an interviewer. This role included these steps: I created an interview guide based on the research purpose and research questions for this study, identified, contacted, and recruited participants, interviewed participants, recorded the interviews, transcribed interviews, coded and analyzed interviews, and drew inferences and conclusions from the data collected during interviews. In the next section, I will discuss how I recruited participants for this study.

<div align="center">

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

</div>

I recruited participants by contacting former students at Bucks County Community College and Twitter. My target sample size ten interviews and easily met that goal. Initial interviews to lasted ninety minutes and no follow-up interviews were scheduled. Upon completion of the interviews, participants were given a $10 Amazon gift card through email for their participation. They were also given my business card if they need to contact me. I also offered all interviewees a copy of the final dissertation. I wanted participants to know I was operating in a transparent and ethical manner and I would use their information appropriately.

Personal or Professional Relationships with Interview Subjects

Interview participants were recruited by asking two former and one current student of mine at Bucks Co. Community College (Bucks), a large, publicly funded, two-year college in southeastern Pennsylvania, approximately 30 miles from Philadelphia, PA. I am a Professor in the Communication Studies area and have been a full-time, tenured faculty for eighteen years. I

teach the courses offered in the major including Effective Speaking, Interpersonal and Intercultural Communication, Media and Society, Communication Theory, and Persuasive Communication, so I was in contact with a wide variety of students on campus and began my recruitment efforts by contacting students through the college's e-mail server. Through conversations with numerous students in and out of class, I learned that many students participated in the MFOL marches in 2018 across the numerous school districts within Bucks County. These former students referred me to nearly all the additional participants in my study. One participant was recruited through a contact made on the social media platform Twitter.

Biases or Power Relationships That May Have Existed

The obvious power relationship was that of a student and professor and the potential for asymmetrical power was a real potential but was minimal since the interviewees were no longer students in my classes at Bucks. I felt three approaches would assist me in minimizing this power dynamic. First, in conversations with students and potential interviewees, it was clear they were very keen to share their experiences, perspectives, and positions. Students who participated in social and political movements have shared those experiences with classmates and me through presentations and papers in class, which led to interviewing them for this project. To minimize undue influence or power by me, I needed to leverage that willingness to share when I initially approach students during recruitment. Also, this topic was safe enough for students to talk about, given the focus of my study. There was the added benefit of holding these interviews over two years after the fact, so much time had elapsed and interviewees felt more comfortable. I was not looking for students to disclose difficult or challenging information about themselves and the interview had no relation to their role as a student in my classes at Bucks.

A second step taken to minimize the power dynamic is to assume and emphasize a collaborative, academic approach to a vexing social problem that students played a part in trying to fix. In my classes, I assume a collaborative, discursive, and iterative approach to learning that is not lecture-based. Rather, I engage with students so they can deconstruct and/or construct learning in all of my classes. I have contextualized their learning experiences within my own as I have worked through my Ph.D. at Nova. Emphasizing a collaborative, academic approach to a shared problem – gun ownership and gun violence – allowed students to gain valuable insight to not only how to engage over social issues but also within completing a doctoral dissertation.

Finally, the third step to minimizing the professor/student dynamic is one heavily emphasized by Morris (2015) and Kvale (2007) and that is establishing rapport early in the interview so the interviewee is comfortable, Morris refers to a "productive interpersonal climate" (2015, p.79) and recommends that before beginning the formal interview, the interviewer should take these steps:

- Introduce herself again and thank the interviewee,

- explain the purpose of the research and the role of the interview,

- clarify why the study is important and the reason the interviewee has been selected,

- make it clear how the interview will work and that interviewees can interrupt and/or respond as they feel is relevant

- emphasize there is not a right or wrong answer to the questions being asked, and

- ask permission to record the interview.

I followed these steps to and felt it built a collaborative, open, and constructive climate for the interviews to happen. Generally, interviews lasted well over an hour and in two cases stretched

out for over two hours. Participants mentioned how comfortable they felt discussing sometimes personal dynamics that occurred in their family and friend circles.

Interview Procedure

Steiner Kvale (2007) defined a research interview as "an interview where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee" (p. 291). In addition, he lists twelve modes of understanding essential for interviewers including being able to:

1. Understand the life world of interviewees

2. Understanding the meaning of central themes of the subjects' lived world

3. The ability to seek qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language

4. The encouragement of description

5. Eliciting specific descriptions, not opinion

6. Interviewer openness or what Kvale calls 'qualified naïveté'

7. A focus on particular themes

8. Ability by the interviewer to deal with ambiguous and contradictory statements

9. Ability by the interviewer to deal with changing descriptions

10. Sensitivity towards subjects

11. Realization that the knowledge constructed results from the interpersonal situation created between interviewer and interviewee

12. The interviewer should be able to address those interpersonal dynamics and make the experience positive for both parties.

Kvale's definition and twelve modes of understanding for the interviewer provided important guideposts for me in my study. Sensitivity to the constructed nature of knowledge was an important philosophical, ethical, and practical consideration I needed to make central to my

project. Especially given identity, culture, structure, and narrative. Interviews provided the best option for me to purposefully converse with people about their lived experiences. Engaging with others, ask follow-up questions, and discuss their perspectives allowed for a rich set of data points to emerge.

Working from a qualitative and constructivist perspective, Wengraf (2001) highlights the four features of in-depth interviewing: First, "The interview is a research interview, designed for the purpose of improving knowledge" (p. 3). Second, "It is a special type of conversational interaction" (p. 3). Third, "It has to be planned and prepared for like other forms of research activity but what is planned is a deliberate half-scripted or quarter-scripted interview" (p. 3). Fourth, "It is to go into matters 'in-depth'" (p. 3). Wengraf's (2001) work was of special importance to my project because of his emphasis on preparation for the semi-structured interview. For a semi-structured interview to succeed, he argues they require "as much preparation before the session, more discipline and more creativity in the session, and certainly, more time for analysis and interpretation after the session." (p.5) His emphasis on preparation, creativity, and analysis is of special value to my study. I will discuss my specific methodology later in this paper.

Morris (2015) defines a semi-structured in-depth interview as being "similar to a conversation in that there are two individuals discussing a topic of mutual interest and ideally the discussion is relaxed, open, and honest" (p. 3). The approach Morris takes regarding interviews – rigorous but pragmatic with an emphasis on personal connections adds value and perspective to my study. In addition, his interview guide model will be adopted for my study and discussed next.

Interview Guide

Numerous researchers including Gallagher (2013), Kvale (2007), Castillo-Montoya (2016), Turner (2010), and Morris (2015) stress the vital importance of organizing and preparing an interview guide for the in-depth, semi-structured interview. Having an interview guide allowed for focus, clarity, and ease of understanding so interviewees can provide answers easily and clearly. Planning occurred well before we met for interviews. In the following section, I will outline the interview protocol I followed for this study and then introduce the interview guide including interview questions I used in my study.

The interview protocol used in this study is modeled after Castillo-Montoya's (2016) model and includes four phases: First, ensure interview questions align with research questions. Second, conduct an inquiry-based conversation. Third, receive feedback or assess the protocol. Fourth, pilot the interview protocol. I will briefly discuss each phase in the following section. Ensuring interview questions align with research questions helps create intentional, necessary, and clear interview questions. The complex experiences people hold need time, careful listening, and intentional follow-up for those experiences to be revealed. To help build an inquiry-based protocol, interview questions should not be stated as research questions. Rather, interview questions were composed to help build understanding, used the knowledge of context, norms, every-day language, and avoided jargon or technical, academic language. Questions were asked one at a time and were drawn from the four types of interview questions. Castillo-Montoya (2016) stated that these four interview questions include: First, introductory questions that are relatively neutral and elicit general and non-intrusive information that are non-threatening. Second, transition questions that link the introductory questions to the key questions to be asked. Third, key questions that are most related to the research questions and purpose of the study.

Fourth, closing questions that are easy to answer and provide opportunity for closure. A final preparation point in this stage would be to consider follow-up questions or prompts to help guide the conversation. The third step in the interview protocol by Castillo-Montoya (2016) is receiving feedback or assessing the protocol. Castillo-Montoya (2016) provides a rubric I used to assess and test my interview protocol:

Table 1

Interview Guide Rubric

Aspects of an Interview Protocol	YES	NO	FEEDBACK
Interview Protocol Structure			
Beginning questions are factual in nature			
Key questions are majority of the questions and are placed between beginning and ending questions			
Questions at the end of the interview are reflective and provide participant an opportunity to share closing comments			
A brief script throughout the interview protocol provides smooth transitions between topic areas			
Interviewer closes with expressed gratitude and any intents to stay connected or follow up			
Overall, interview is organized to promote conversational flow			
Writing of Interview Questions & Statements			
Questions/statements are free from spelling errors			
Only one question is asked at a time			
Most questions ask participants to describe experiences and feelings			
Questions are mostly open-ended			
Questions are written in a non-judgmental manner			
Length of interview protocol			
All questions are needed			
Questions/statements are concise			
Comprehension			
Questions/statements are devoid of academic language			
Questions/statements are easy to understand			

The final phase of the interview protocol was to pilot and test the interview questions. Besides careful self-assessment using the above rubric, tested the questions with a small sample of students in one class to determine if the questions met the standards on the rubric and if they made sense. Since my interviewees were also college students, testing the questions with a

cohort of students seemed like a reasonable course of action. In the following phase, I will expand this protocol to include an interview guide that connects interview questions to research questions.

Morris (2015) provides guidelines for developing the interview guide I adopted for my study. The following section will connect the research questions posed to specific topics within the interview guide along with questions for each topic area. Morris recommends that the interview guide is built by key topics developed by using the research questions for the study. Each topic area includes interview questions I asked participants. Morris also recommends these types of questions: Experiences/behaviors or questions that ask what a person does or has done, opinion/value questions or questions that ask interviewees what their opinion is of something related to the topic under discussion, feeling questions or questions that aim to understand an interviewee's emotional response to their experiences, knowledge questions or factual questions about a situation, policy, or process, sensory questions or questions that focus on what the interviewee has seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, and background questions that probe personal characteristics, such as age, education, occupation, marital status, etc. Table two (2) below links my research questions with the topics I explored with interviewees:

Table 2

Research Questions and Interview Topics

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW TOPICS
RQ1: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement?	Protester Identity
RQ 2: How did protesters view the MFOL movement?	Protester Perceptions of MFOL movement
RQ3: What motivated them to join the FOL movement?	Protester Motivations
RQ4: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they marched, and after marches?	Protester Relationships and Support with Other Protesters
RQ5: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement?	Protester Connections and Perceptions Through social media

In the following section, I will connect interview questions with the topics listed above and a draft version of my interview guide. This interview guide includes a primary set of questions I asked interviewees and possible follow-up questions.

Table 3

Interview Guide

Interview Guide: Protester perspectives, perceptions, attitudes, and motivations while participating in the MFOL movement.

Topics:
    1. Introductory Questions
    2. Protester Identity
    3. Protester Perceptions of MFOL
    4. Protester Motivations
    5. Protester Relationships and Support with Other Protesters
    6. Protester Connections and Perceptions Through Social Media
    7. Closing Questions
Note: Transition Questions will be placed between topics at the discretion of the interviewer.

Topic 1: Introductory Questions Background questions are useful here, including age, education, employment, where they grew up, occupation, etc. Tell me about your role in the MFOL movement. What is your earliest memory about a social movement?
Topic 2: Protester Identity Questions **<u>Primary question:</u>** How politically active were you before joining this movement?

Possible follow-up questions: What led you to join this movement? How did you feel while you were protesting? Did marching in these protests affect your personality or how you saw yourself? Did your role at school change as a result? Did your role at home change at all? How did friends and family react to your participation in these marches? How did protesters see themselves as it related to the MFOL movement? How did their personality connect with this movement? Was this the first time you marched or protested?

Topic 3: Protester Perceptions on MFOL Questions

Primary questions: How much did you know about gun ownership or gun violence in the United States before joining MFOL?
Possible follow-up questions: What did you know about this movement? How did you feel about protest or protesters generally? As you participated and marched in this movement, how did you feel about it? Did your perspective change as time went on? How do you feel about this movement now, two years later? Would you participate in this movement again, if you could? Do you feel the movement was supportive of protesters and helped foster good relationships with friends and families? Do you feel gun control is still a relevant issue as the United States heads towards a presidential election in 2020? Did the protests change your perspective on gun ownership or gun violence? Are you a registered voter? Do you plan on voting in the election this year? Will gun control be a deciding factor in how you cast your vote? How effective did the protesters think the MFOL movement was in communicating a persuasive message that affected change?

Topic 4: Protester Motivation Questions

Primary questions: If you were in high school when you marched, were there penalties for participating in these marches? What made you decide to walk out of school and participate? Are you satisfied with your decision?
Possible follow-up questions: Did you ever feel social pressure either way – to participate or not – from friends, teachers, family members or anyone in your community? What would you say to a young person in high school today if they faced the choice to participate or not? Would you encourage or discourage them from participating? What were the compelling messages and themes that motivated them to join?

Topic 5: Protester Relationships and Support with Other Protesters Questions

Primary questions: Were you able to make new friendships or meet new people because of participating in this movement? Can you describe any situations where protesters supported each other through a challenging situation before, during or after a protest march?
Possible follow-up questions: Did you feel protesters were supportive of one another? Were you able to maintain those friendships or relationships over the long term? Was there a time when you saw another protester express strong emotion such as sadness or anger? How was that protester supported, if at all? As you were protesting, did you ever encounter counter-protesters? What was that like? What was the nature of the relational dynamics that occurred while part of this movement?

Topic 6: Protester Connections and Perceptions Through Social Media

Primary question: What role did social media play in managing protester identity, connecting with other protesters, and connecting with the MFOL movement?

Possible follow-up questions: Do you feel the movement did a good job in how it communicated using social media? Who did you engage with most frequently through social media? Did you communicate with people opposed to your movement? What kinds of negative messages did you see about MFOL? Did social media play a big role in how you saw yourself?

Topic 7: Closing Questions

Ask the interviewee if there is anything else they would like to add. Have they thought much about the future of this social movement? If so, how do they see the future? Ask if it is okay to contact them to follow up. Ask if they would like a copy of the interview and final dissertation.

The questions in the interview guide align with the key topic areas and the research questions of this study. The questions meet the criteria on the rubric for the interview protocol and the criteria set forth by Morris (2015):

Questions should be worded to:

- Probe, not cross-examine

- Inquire, not challenge

- Suggest, not demand

- Uncover, not trap

- Draw out, not pump

- Guide, not dominate

This section discussed the alignment of the research purpose with research questions, the alignment of interview questions with research questions, and the final draft version of the interview guide I used when I conducted data-gathering interviews with protesters. This section also introduced the interview protocol rubric I used to guide me as I refined the interview guide questions. My main goal was to ensure clarity in the questions I asked and to balance the information within each of the topic areas. Naturally, the goal was to develop thick and rich

descriptions of perspectives, perceptions, and connections; however, I also did not want to overwhelm interviewees with questions, especially if they were redundant.

The interview guide proved to be a valuable asset when I conducted the interviews for this study. I asked a consistent set of questions to all ten of my interviewees while I maintained the flexibility to ask follow-up questions as needed. This flexible approach allowed me to have in-depth conversations with the interviewees and provided them much needed room to think through each question and expand on their answers at a comfortable pace. Because of careful alignment of interview and follow-up questions with the research purpose and research questions, I gathered a good deal of data and conduct analysis using two distinct forms of narrative analysis. The following section will address procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection.

Data Collection

Data was collected by interviewing protesters who marched or protested in the MFOL movement while attending high school in 2018 in suburban Philadelphia. I collected the data by interviewing protesters in at least one 90-minute interview via Zoom. I video recorded interviews so I could capture non-verbal reactions and interactions I had with interviewees. I also made manual notes during the interview. Since interviews were conducted via Zoom, I recorded those interactions for easy transcription. Recorded interviews were downloaded from Zoom and stored on a USB storage device and in my cloud storage account with Dropbox.com. While holding the meetings via Zoom, all meetings had a unique access code for participants to use when joining the meeting. Interviewees had to wait in the waiting room area before entering the Zoom conference with me. These security measures helped ensure security, privacy, and confidentiality while conducting the interviews online. The transcribed interviews and all associated electronic

materials will be saved by me in a securely locked file cabinet in my home office. Electronic media will be stored on a USB drive and online. Both sets of data and material will be saved for two years and then destroyed by me. This section covered the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection for my study. In the following section, I will cover how I analyzed the data gathered in the interviews.

Data Analysis

This study employed a thematic and structural narrative analysis methodology that used in-depth, semi-structured interviews for data gathering and analysis. There are three distinct parts to this section: First, I will briefly outline my epistemological orientation. Second, I will define the term 'narrative methodology' and include thematic and structural analysis components. Third, I will describe how I analyzed the data and share the initial results. My goals in this section are to clearly define Narrative Analysis and align my overall purpose and research questions.

Narrative Methodology Defined

The richness and diversity of narrative methodology is well-suited to this study of protester identity. Chase (2018, p. 547) illustrates the connection between narratives and socially situated interactions embedded in interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts by defining narrative: "a distinct form of discourse that functions as retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience…a way of understanding one's own and others actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time." Narrative methodology is also well-suited for this study because of what narrative 'does' as humans engage with one another. Individual and group construction of identity is one of the most obvious outcomes of storytelling. The fluid and

dual nature of identity is such that it is in a constant state of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong. And of most relevance to this study is that personal narratives can encourage others to act. "speaking out invites political mobilization and change as evidenced by the ways stories invariably circulate in sites where social movements are forming…narratives do political work." (Riessman, 2008, p. 8) Finally, I will complete this definition of narrative methodology by covering seven characteristics articulated by Riessman (2008) as they directly relate to the larger context of my study. First, narratives constitute and reconcile past experiences and perceptions in the present moment. Second, narrators argue with stories. Third, all storytelling involves persuading an audience. Fourth, storytelling engages an audience in the experience of the narrator. Fifth, effective narratives are entertaining. Sixth, stories can function to mislead an audience. Seventh, stories can mobilize others into action for social change. The majority of these functions overlap and connect to my study and what I hope to learn.

As it relates to methodological considerations, Robert and Shenhav (2014) suggest that researchers grapple with two fundamental questions when conducting narrative analysis. The first question pertains to the status attributed to the narrative: is it defined as the very fabric of human existence or as one representational device among others? The second question refers to the perspective developed on narrative. Is it defined as the characteristic of an approach, an object of investigation or both? I will address both questions in the following section. First, the status of narrative question. For my study, I see narratives as a deep structure of human existence and that narratives play a fundamental role in structuring the human mind, rationality, and ultimately, identity. It is through narrative we humans come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world and how we constitute our social identity. Narratives create the social world. This perspective is connected to the epistemological position articulated in this study and

why I have examined, identity, culture, and structures of violence that exist in American society as it relates to guns, violence, protest, and legislative possibilities. Given this approach, there are implications for validity and reliability. According to Robert and Shenhav (2014, p.6): "A researcher will not be so preoccupied with sifting through the narrative to unveil reality. Indeed, if narratives constitute human life or a part of it, then we don't need a bridge to 'access' reality as the descriptive realists do since narratives are life itself." Mertova and Webster (2020) elaborate on this point and explains that since researchers are investigating individual interpretations and worldviews of complex events, we need to rethink validity and reliability as it relates to narrative methodology. Reliability can be achieved by examining the trustworthiness of notes or transcripts of interviews. Does the researcher have access to context, process, and construction of knowledge? And issues of trustworthiness, honesty, verisimilitude, and authenticity should be employed by the researcher to reframe validity and reliability. The trustworthiness of narrative research can be established by investigating the truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality of data and information within the narrative presented during investigation. Honesty is explored by investigating the responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, knowledge base expansion, procedural immediacy, opportunities for clarification and summarization, and an opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses of participants. Verisimilitude includes these three aspects: the reporting of stories and events should resonate with the experience of the researcher, the reporting should have a level of plausibility, and reporting results will be confirmed through like and other events. Finally, authenticity can be achieved when the researcher provides enough information to convince the reader.

The second key question I will address is the perspective on narrative I will adopt for this study. Robert and Shenhav provide two possible perspectives, narrative as an approach and

narrative as an object. This study will view narrative as an approach. This perspective will allow me to address narrative as a specific paradigm, with a specific axiology, and employing a specific set of analytical procedures. The paradigm this study aligns itself with is the interpretivist/constructivist approach. Human actors socially co-construct reality, worldview, and identity through the stories they craft and share with others in their communities. The axiological position of this study is to not only give voice to participants journey as they constructed their sense of identity but to privilege the voice of young people directly involved in an issue that has direct implications for their daily lives as students. It is through this axiological choice that the analytical approach will be defined.

Generally, the approach I took included conducting a thematic and structural analysis of the ten interviews I conducted as outlined in Riessman (2008), Morgan and Hoffman (2018), and Yuan and Ngai (2018). Thematic analysis drew from the work of Riessman (2008) and included a bounded segment of interview text about an incident (The definition of narrative), analysis of lengthy interview excerpts (Attention to form and language), Acts of resistance reported in personal narratives (Unit of analysis), focusing on the personal and local (Attention to contexts). Because of the theoretical orientations used in this study – Culturist/Social Constructivist, Framing, and Structural and Cultural Violence, special attention was given to individual and social contexts, which opened up the possibility for structural analysis of the interviews. Attending to how interviewees structured and framed their lived experiences and perspectives and noting how they used narrative elements such as the abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Riessman, 2008), I added an additional layer of analysis to each interview, which led to improved analysis and richer descriptions. Similar approaches to

thematic and structural narrative and identity are found in Mittapalli (2014), Richmond (2015), Norman (2020), and Grant and Zeeman (2015).

The steps for creating datasets for analysis included: (1) I generated interview transcripts from our Zoom meetings and printed them, (2) I manually annotated the interviews so I could familiarize myself with the data and create initial descriptive codes, (3) I conducted a round of narrative thematic and structural analysis by examining the whole text for themes including looking at the grammar and syntax choices of the interviewees, and looking for consistent stories that emerge through the frameworks of orientation, abstraction, complicating action or conflict and resolution. (4) Wrote summary analysis codes for each interview, (5) Identified codes that could be linked, condensed, and joined into categories and subcategories, (6) Looked for emerging themes across categories, including those raised in narrative analysis and ensure codes are standard and distinct, (7) Used those emerging themes to develop findings, (8) Created a table of codes and categories linking interview questions to codes, categories, and sub-categories. This allows me to link research questions to specific findings and include specific quotations from interviewees to illustrate and exemplify each. A sample table for this point:

Table 4

Research Questions, Interview Topics, and Emergent Themes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW TOPICS	EMERGENT THEMES

By conducting a thematic narrative and structural analysis using these steps I was able to easier link the emergent themes to a conceptual framework of identity formation within the context of a nonviolent social protest movement. In the following section, I will discuss interviews.

Data Analysis Plan

This section will discuss the procedure I used for coding data for analysis. For my study, I transcribed and analyzed the interviews I conducted myself. This was especially advantageous,

given my study. By transcribing and analyzing the data myself, I became intimately acquainted with the content which inevitably led to a more in-depth analysis. Generally, I followed the transcription and coding procedures set out by Morris (2015). To ensure accuracy, I transcribed the interviews first by keeping an accurate record of the interview by creating a table that listed the name of the interviewee, the pseudonym assigned for coding, the date of the interview, the location, a rating of the quality of the interview, and a comments section. This allowed me to organize my data so I could track, note, and code easily in the next step. I also ensured that interviews, associated data, and consent forms were carefully recorded and stored. I used a three-layer system of storing data: First, I saved it on my password secured and dedicated work laptop in clearly marked folders. Second, I saved the data to a USB drive dedicated to my dissertation research. Third, I stored all material in my password-secured and encrypted cloud storage account with Dropbox.com. This system will ensure I have multiple versions stored in three locations as backups.

Before discussing the system of coding, I used in my study, Morris (2015) raises the important consideration of how to view interview data. He lists three perspectives: First, viewing interview data as resource. This means interview data collected are seen (more or less) as reflecting the interviewee's reality outside the interview. The second perspective is viewing interview data as topic, which means interview data collected are (more or less) reflecting a reality jointly constructed by the interviewee and the interviewer. Morris also proposes what he calls the 'compromise position', whereby the interviewer approaches the interview material reflexively. This compromise or third position is the position I adopted as I analyzed interview material in my study. I was mostly concerned with approaching the data thematically and

structurally while I connected those themes to each of the research topics and their corresponding research question.

To analyze the data thematically, I adopted Morris' five stage approach:

- Stage 1: Careful read-through and note taking. This involves reading through transcribed interviews and making notes about each interview regarding overall quality and key aspects that emerged.

- Stage 2: Notable quotes. Note striking quotes that capture key points and themes. Quotes that express strong feelings, conflict, use metaphor, or strong imagery are especially useful.

- Stage 3: Coding and finding themes. Using the interview guide, I will develop themes that emerge in the transcripts. Other methods for identifying themes include repetition, powerful and illuminating accounts, and themes that are distinct and do not overlap.

- Stage 4: Selecting themes. I will use existing research on the topic to illustrate how my interviews accord with or challenge existing analyses.

- Stage 5: Interpreting and writing up the interview data. I will identify overarching themes and connective threads using the interview data and then connect those themes and threads to the research questions for answers. I will draw out the required evidence in the interviews to back up every conclusion. Connection, context, interpretation, and balance are necessary when conveying these findings.

This five-stage procedure also helped me address issues of credibility through high levels of transparency and alignment of data with the research problems and questions. I ensured the evidence used is credible and my interpretation was reliable and honest. In addition, the number

of questions I used in my interview guide ensure transferability because of the thick and rich

descriptions I drew out from interviewees. Based on this five-stage model, I created a substantive

coding system based on a model provided by Morgan and Hoffman (2018) as follows:

Table 5

Coding System

Protester Identity	• Changes to identity noticed by participants • Changes to identity noticed by significant others (Family, friends, teachers, etc.) • Attributions made by participants for changes to identity
Protester Perceptions of MFOL	• Positive feelings, perspectives, and attitudes towards MFOL movement • Negative feelings, perspectives, and attitudes towards MFOL movement
Protester Motivations	• Factors and influences on students • Specifically, what prompted them to join and participate?
Protester Relationships and Support with Other Protesters	• Positive and negative relationships within the movement • How did protesters relate and support one another? • How did protesters handle criticism inside and outside the movement?
Protester Connections and Perceptions Through social media	• How did protesters utilize social media platforms before, during, and after protests? • What role did social media play in perceptions, relationship-building, and support within the movement? • Did social media influence identity?

This chapter covered these sections: the participants for this study, the ethical issues that

were part of this study and how I resolved them, the interview procedure used to collect data and

the data analysis procedure. In chapter IV, I will describe the results of the interviews I

conducted, reveal the key themes that emerged, and align them with the research questions for

the study. describe the findings for my study. In chapter V, I will discuss interpretations and

implications of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

As a result of the ten interviews conducted, seventeen key themes emerged around the five research questions for the study. Emergent themes revealed how protesters saw themselves, the value they placed on gun violence in schools, gun violence in American society, and what might be done about it. Protesters discussed the connections between them and their fellow protesters, family members, teachers, and other members of the community and how these connections helped to foster growth and change in their self-perception, perception of others, and even their position on gun ownership and gun violence. Interviews also revealed young protesters who did not have a significant agenda, politically speaking but who developed a position and awareness rather quickly and, often, where a position did not exist before. The remainder of this chapter will present the results of the interviews I conducted, including an explanation of participant demographics, summarize the main findings, provide evidence of how the analysis derived the result which will lead to a discussion of the significance of these findings in chapter five.

Interviews and Analysis

Ten (Seven females, average age 20.9) interviews were conducted with students who directly participated in the March for Our Lives (MFOL) protests in the spring of 2018. Nine were in college and one was a recent graduate who worked as a journalist and independent writer. Due to Covid-19 (C-19) social distancing restrictions, interviews were securely conducted via Zoom during November of 2020. Interviews were on average seventy minutes in length and twice lasted nearly two hours. Because of these interviews, over five-hundred pages of transcripts were generated for analysis. Two of the interviewees were former students and one was a student at Bucks County Community College. Eight out of ten of the interviewees attended

high school within Bucks county, a county in suburban Philadelphia just north of the city. Five of the interviewees attended Pennridge School district, which rose to national prominence after organizing protests during weekly detentions after students staged walkouts in defiance of school policy established in response to the Parkland protests. As protesters served detention on Saturdays, they held silent vigils which gained a viral status on social media and garnered the support of the national March for Our Lives (MFOL) organizers and celebrities such as Alysa Milano and Patton Oswalt. Because of their detention day protests, Pennridge 225 organizers were invited to attend the national MFOL protests in Washington D.C. that spring. Two participants attended school within the Philadelphia school district and one interviewee attended Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, FL. The remaining seven interviews were because of referrals from those three students.

Here is a table listing the interviewees. The names listed are pseudonyms assigned to each:

Table 6

Participant Description

Participant	Description
Abraham	19-year old Asian male
Beth Ann	20-year old, white female
Connie	21-year old African American female
Doreen	20-year old white female
Elizabeth	22-year old white female
Francine	21-year old female
Gregory	22-year old male
Henry	18-year old male
Jessica	20-year old female
Kathleen	26-year old female

In the table below, I summarize the results of my interviews. Primary interview questions are included. Follow-up questions are not listed here but can be found in the interview guide in

Chapter 3. Emergent themes are summarized below with details and supporting quotations provided in the following section.

Table 7

Research Questions, Interview Topics, and Emergent Themes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW TOPICS	EMERGENT THEMES
RQ1: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement?	Protester Identity	• Open-ness • Parental support • Understanding • Intersectionality
RQ 2: How did protesters view the MFOL movement?	Protester Perceptions of MFOL movement	• Protest as a new idea • Protest as a form of student empowerment • Protest as a form of solidarity and connection • Protest as an opportunity for growth, learning, and connection
RQ3: What motivated them to join the MFOL movement?	Protester Motivations	• Out of respect for victims of other school shootings • Fear • Reactions from teachers and administrators at their school • Reactions from family and friends about protest activity • Predisposition to protest
RQ4: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they marched, and after marches?	Protester Relationships and Support with Other Protesters	• High levels of support and connection throughout
RQ5: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement?	Protester Connections and Perceptions Through Social Media	• Toxic masculinity • High levels of tolerance for opposing viewpoints • Reconciling personality and position based on feedback

My analytical approach was to conduct multiple readings of the interview transcripts. I viewed the stored video interviews three times, noting answers provided and noting consistencies

and emergent themes. Following the review of videos, I conducted multiple readings of the printed transcripts for each interview. During the first reading, I made manual notations of key ideas I saw emerging. During the second reading, I connected themes to the research questions for the study. In the final reading, I connected participant quotations to each theme. Then, I reconciled my notes from the videos of interviews with the printed transcripts to ensure consistency. Results are presented below with pseudonyms for each interviewee to preserve anonymity. Quotations are largely verbatim. However, some have been slightly abridged for concision as marked by a long ellipsis. The section is arranged around the research question and the findings associated with each.

Overall Results

Research Question One: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement?

Generally, interviewees reported a broadening of perspective and self-awareness in relation to social issues and how they fit at various levels (Community, family, friends, and more broadly at the national level. The persistent theme that emerged in relation to this research question was "Open-ness". Participants frequently responded they were curious and open-minded when it came to how they how they saw themselves. There was a willingness and even eagerness to learn more about issues and people to change their identity. Interviewees saw themselves as learners first and built their identity in relation to not only the protest but where they might fit in the debate going forward.

A second theme that emerged in this research question was perception of parents and level of support interviewees received. While interviewees mentioned friends and their social group as important, parents occupied a special place when it came to perception and support.

A third theme related to protester identity was that of understanding. While not articulated as self-knowledge, interviewees recalled the necessity of learning more about gun violence along with the necessity of building greater empathy and understanding of others who did not agree or feel as strongly as they did about protest.

A fourth and final theme that emerged in this research question was that of intersectionality of identity and issue. Interviewees saw their identity not only grow but also how their identity intersects with other issues and identities in society. Examples of each with quotations follow.

Open-ness

For example, Beth Ann reported a high level of open-ness to learning about the issue while also learning and building greater awareness of privilege and class status because of participation:

"I really did not pay too much attention to the shootings that happened leading up to Parkland. Then, once I participated in the walk out, I began to see how issues fit together. It really made me aware of how much of a bubble I live in when I hear stories of gun violence and other social issues. I realize how well off I have been and how that might contribute to this friction in our society".

Abraham reported similar feelings: "I did not know gun control was such a political issue until I learned about Parkland. Then I started to learn more about guns, gun violence and politics after I protested".

Doreen: "As I grew up, I tried to adopt Republican values so I could fit in with my family. I always considered myself a person who has a lot of empathy and concern for people, so

when the shootings at Parkland happened, I became nervous because I knew I would have to change my perspective". Doreen sees her participation in protest as a form of character building:

"It was an important stage in my life that prepared me for college and adulthood. It increased my ability to be reliable, helped me become better organized, and taught me to trust people more than I used to".

Elizabeth described herself as motivated and outspoken and was the only person in her friend group who participated in the MFOL protests at her school. "I felt a sense of civic pride and connection with fallen students. I wanted to push for change more than most of my friends so I thought I could make a small difference. It totally opened up my eyes and found myself learning more about guns than I ever thought I would".

Francine described herself as "very moderate" and did not necessarily see the point of the protests: "I was definitely on the sideline leading up to my senior year". Friends helped her re-think her position and persuaded her to march. "The march was a gateway for me to open myself up more. I held completely different views before joining the protest". Francine was one of three interviewees to use the term "Gateway" to describe how the movement helped them transition their identity from early to late adolescents.

Jessica described her identity as more of a "Caregiver" and someone motivated to "Protect kids". "I am an open but protective person who tended to be outspoken in school, so I really wanted to honor the victims of all school shootings".

Greg saw himself as a "Politics guy" since the age of fourteen despite being "Shy and introverted" through high school. "The protests had a big influence on my personality. I have much more of an activist mindset now". Other participants had an identity of protester or activist already shaped. Connie was already active in the Peace Club at her high school and was

consulted by the principal when her school helped organize student protests. Connie reported

speaking at the protest event, even though she never did that kind of thing before: "The more I

did it, the easier it got."

Parental Support

A second theme that emerged in this question was the perception and role family played

in shaping identity. For example, Henry saw himself as an "Average student and person. My

family always makes a big deal out of voting and being a socially active, so it was natural for me

to join this protest".

Connie saw a mixed level of support from parents: "More from my father than my

mother. I never felt pressure or shame from participating but I think my dad was more

comfortable than my mom". Greg felt his participation improved his relationship with his

parents: "They saw me as more mature and able to handle myself well".

Doreen received "Unwavering" support from parents, even though their viewpoints

diverged. "My dad was willing to compromise [his point of view], which I made me feel better".

Francine felt the negative reactions from her parents helped strengthen her resolve to protest.

"My father is still angry over my participation but my mom and I have reconciled and she

understands much better now". Four additional interviewees report high levels of parental

support, even, given detention from school because of walkouts: "It was really cool to see

parents greeting us as we left detention and clapping and cheering for us. It really meant a lot",

reported Beth Ann.

Understanding

Frequently, interviewees admitted to now knowing much about protests, gun violence,

gun ownership or many other timely social issues. However, there was a strong theme of needing

to understand and a willingness to learn about the issues of gun violence, school shootings or many other issues. For example. Beth Ann knew little about protests: "I really knew very little about these issues but that quickly changed". Connie saw the opportunity to learn to deal with strong emotions: "I'm trying to work on learning more so I don't have as much anger or hate inside. Learning helps me cope with difficult feelings".

Abraham felt the protests did not sway his opinions about gun ownership but "I know more about legislation and can articulate a clearer position about the issue, which is a good thing". Elizabeth also holds pro-Second amendment views but: "I knew I needed to learn a lot (And still do) about gun control legislation. I found that to be the most interesting part! The bottom line is you have to educate yourself". Francine discussed the need for educating others: "I enjoy discussing these tough topics and educating people on the other side. I don't have a perfect understanding but know we need to talk more to understand each other better". Jessica focused on credibility as it related to understanding: "You just need to educate yourself because you're a high schooler and people won't listen if you don't know what the facts are". Greg stated: "I feel like I have learned to understand the gun culture in the U.S. as a result of my research. I understand the other side much better now".

Intersectionality

A final theme that emerged from the first research question was intersectionality. This theme grew out of two conversational threads: First, interviewees indicated a higher level of empathy for those affected by gun violence and the opposing viewpoint. Second, interviewees placed their participation in MFOL into a broader social perspective and saw how their protest activity connected them to other movements such as Standing Rock pipeline protests or Black Lives Matter and principles such as freedom of expression, the right to protest, and civic

responsibility. This ability to see outside of oneself is an important identity construct explored further in the next chapter.

For Abraham, he felt empathy for those affected by gun violence generally: "It hit me when I was marching. I felt really bad for those parents and brothers and sisters who lost someone from all of these shootings. I never gave it that much thought before". Abraham thinks "Humility and patience" are a necessary first step when dealing with violence of any kind. Doreen reported a "Heightened level of empathy and thoughtfulness" on this issue and does not protest to make other people feel badly. Doreen: "I saw a clear connection between Parkland and my school district and did not want to see anyone nearby suffer the same pain". For Elizabeth, the protests made her think about "Unsafe conditions and how we could build a safer country for everyone". Francine developed a "Greater awareness of implicit biases I hold as a result of protesting".

A second aspect of intersectionality that emerged from interviews was how issues connected into other movements. This broadening of perspective was articulated in many ways. "As I thought about it more, I realized how issues such as poverty, healthcare, and racism all relate to guns and gun violence. The movement shouldn't just be about guns", said Henry. Beth Ann reported seeing "How issues such as privilege and social class impact violence in our country". Doreen mentioned that she "Admired protesters from around the country, like in Standing Rock and Ferguson, Missouri. I felt like it all fit together. Plus, this was organized by us [Young people]. It is difficult to separate issues like gun violence, poverty, to marginalization". Elizabeth mentioned how protest "Opened up my perspective on my place in society. I talked with students from around the country and began to see how issues of poverty and violence intersected". Francine also developed a broader viewpoint: "My views have shifted

more towards systemic problems in general in our society. We need to make changes so disenfranchised individuals have greater equity". Jessica, who formed a political conscience because of Standing Rock, the earthquake in Haiti, and Black Lives Matter, echoed the systemic and structural problems surrounding MFOL protests: "Nobody pays attention to the tons and tons of shootings that happen in Chicago and Philly. Nobody cares about it until it happens to kids in the suburbs. That's where the intersectionality is". The issues of "Drugs, guns, poverty, and violence" are all visible intersections Kathleen "Sees daily examples of living in Philadelphia". Greg even saw the local MFOL movement as a key support to the broader national movement that occurred in 2018, "Even though it was much smaller in scope, it helped impact the mid-term election later that year [2018]".

Research Question Two: How did protesters view the MFOL movement?

Unsurprisingly, interviewees had an overall positive view of MFOL and social movements generally. This question was due to the connection of identity development and external perception. Responses to this question developed these themes: Interviewees recalled viewing MFOL and protest as new idea, protest as a form of student empowerment and giving people a voice, as a source for finding solidarity and connection through protest, and protest as an opportunity for growth, learning and connection.

Protest as a new idea

The first theme to emerge from interviews was the newness of protest, social movements, and gun violence to many interviewees. For example, Beth Ann said: "I knew very little about all of this (Protests, gun violence) stuff and had to get up to speed quickly". Despite her student leadership role, Connie "Did not know much about gun ownership and gun violence, even with all of the school shootings that happened before Parkland". Abraham "Did not know much about

the movement. I was too focused on school to care". Francine "Didn't necessarily agree with the movement or protest generally". Give their age at the time and the newness of protest activities at their schools, protest was a new idea to many of these students. Often, interviewees recall not knowing of school shootings, protest, or civil disobedience. Given the starting point of little to no knowledge, it is interesting the protests worked and they did in 2018. This group of protesters entered the movement with high openness and willingness to learn and possibly change their ideas.

As a form of student empowerment

Henry saw the MFOL movement as a way for "Young people to gain respect and get their voices heard. We were the ones in school and were at the greatest risk of being shot and wanted to make sure that did not happen". Kathleen saw protesters as "Incredibly savvy, confident, and persuasive in all contexts" (Such as social media, interviews, and in speeches). Jessica's experience showed high levels of empowerment and persuasion: "Students who were eighteen were actively registering to vote during that spring (of 2018). It probably helped change the mid-terms that year". Francine also saw the protests as a way to "Exercise my rights and help others exercise theirs". Elizabeth saw these protests as a way of building resistance to the Trump presidency: "I began protesting when my mom took me to the woman's march rally around the time Donald Trump was elected and I wanted to keep protesting because I could not vote yet". Doreen stated: "I saw students as having the capacity to make change happen. These were our schools, so it was on us. The way we planned, organized, and led protests was amazing". Finally, Connie saw the movement as a chance to give students a voice on other issues: "Because of my race, I felt outnumbered. I thought this would help us speak with a louder voice on guns and racial injustice".

As a source of solidarity and connection

A third theme that emerged from this research question was the feeling of solidarity and connection protesters felt as they marched. Elizabeth articulated the feeling nicely: "The sense of unity was important to me during the protests. I was afraid they would turn violent so it was nice to see a sense of solidarity between us. We need more of this feeling in the country". Besides gaining respect and getting their voices heard, Henry especially appreciated the "Shared unity" among the protesters. Doreen even found solidarity "During the silent, two-hour long protest we staged while serving our detention".

As an opportunity for growth, learning and connection

Finally, a sense of opportunity for growth, learning and connection was a common theme among interviewees. Francine: "I saw the protest as an opportunity to exercise my rights and help others exercise theirs". Jessica appreciated the "Amazing…feeling of connection and accomplishment by taking part in these protests". Henry mentioned how any protest activity has the "Potential to help you grow". Beth also reported how learning occurred because of participating in the protests: "This was the first protest I was involved in. I felt strongly about all of the school shootings that occurred during my childhood but did not know where to channel my energy. These protests seemed like a good place to learn more about guns and school shootings".

Research Question Three: What motivated them to join the MFOL movement?

Responses to questions about motivation were varied and provided insight into personality and disposition in relation to protesting school shootings. Many interviewees spoke from a place of genuine concern for others, respect for other students who were killed in school shootings, or as an extension of their already formed personality. Others had a hard time not

seeing striking similarities between the demographics and socioeconomic status of Parkland and

their communities in suburban Philadelphia. Interviewees were consistent in their responses with

how they positioned politics and protest in their lives. Many acknowledge not having a formed

political consciousness or not being aware of how politics and policies impact gun ownership.

Responses in this section are grouped around the five themes of respect for other victims, fear,

reaction from teachers and administrators at school, reactions from family and friends, and a

predisposition to protest.

Respect for other victims

Many interviewees responded to this question recalling a sense of frustration, anguish,

and sadness for the victims of school and mass shootings which were frequent news items

between 2012 – 2018. The shootings at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school were the final

straw for many since the similarities between school districts was hard to ignore. Beth Ann was

direct in her motive for joining MFOL: "I was frustrated and sad so many students died again. I

marched out of respect for the fallen". Abraham shared this motivation: "I'm generally apolitical

and not interested in social movements. But hearing about these shootings made me want to

show some respect for students and families who suffered horrible losses". Francine extended

her thinking beyond school shootings: "I questioned the logic of gun ownership but felt I needed

to march for all victims of oppression and violence in the U.S. I saw my protest as standing with

BLM (Black Lives Matter) protesters and climate activists as well".

Fear

Besides being outspoken in her positions and opinions, Elizabeth saw this as a basic

safety issue and acted out of concern for her younger brother, who was a freshman at her high

school at the time: "I was very concerned with unsafe conditions at the school because of guns.

The active shooter drills we had to do really upset my younger brother". Jessica felt similarly: "Marjorie Stoneman Douglas was definitely a motivator but personally, the active shooter drills were more terrifying than helpful. We did not understand why these were allowed but regulating guns was not". "It all really got to me", reported Henry. "Everything involved with these shootings, the chaos, stress, school board meetings, and all of the anxiety from worry just got me to focus my energy on protest. I knew this was serious and something had to be done, especially because of the effects shootings have on communities and families, even when they are not directly involved".

Reactions from teachers and administrators at their school

Connie learned "School administration was hesitant to support the walkout by students. As a student leader, I advocated for the march to be coordinated and that it take place on school grounds so no one would be suspended". Doreen received a different reaction from the members of the school board, parents, and administrators at her school: "Despite a national movement, we saw the school board was not moving. We attended the meeting and were surprised we were shouted at and told not to march. School board members were mostly 'card-carrying' conservatives who supported gun rights more than protest". Shortly after protests occurred at her school, Doreen found herself called into the principal's office and confronted over her social media account: "The principal really surprised me when he asked about specific posts in my account. I couldn't believe it!"

Reactions from family and friends

Three interviewees reported protesting because of reactions from family members and close friends. For example, Connie saw the election of Donald Trump as one factor in her decision to protest and the reaction from her mother as a factor: "The election of Trump pushed

my family to the brink and I felt like participating in this protest would be a good outlet, based on how my family felt about guns". Elizabeth reported feelings of social pressure: "There was definitely a degree of social pressure to participate in these protests. I didn't mind but I think it kept some of my friends at a distance. Then, you would hear occasional murmurs in the hallways when people thought negatively about a protester". For Francine, protest was personal: "Negative reactions from my parents definitely got me there [to protest]… I was shocked at how adamant parents were about punishing their kids for protest activity. On top of everything else, I thought this was especially unfair". Jessica experienced both positive and negative feedback from friends and family over her protest activity: "My boyfriend's family was not happy that I was doing this but I went ahead anyway. After the walkout at my school, my aunt and I attended the larger national protest in Washington D.C.".

Predisposition to protest

Elizabeth reported: "I'm outspoken and motivated, generally. I also feel very strongly about enacting common sense gun control plus it was my senior year. I felt I had little to lose if I tried to make my voice heard". Besides the reactions of the school board and administration at her school, Doreen articulated her predisposition to protest: "I've always had lots of problems with authority, so the protest seemed like a great opportunity to challenge multiple authority figures". Elise reported her disposition this way: "Attending the woman's march after the Trump election was a catalyst that made me feel I had better continue raising my voice". Greg saw protest as "your civic duty as an American…I lost hope for change to begin at all and even though I like to protest, I resigned myself to doing nothing until March for Our Lives".

Research Question Four: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they marched, and after marches?

This question was posed so interviewees could examine and articulate the nature of the relationships they had or the relationships they developed because of participating in this movement. With identity as a construct of reflected self-appraisal, these relationships formed or reinforced as part of this protest activity it is useful to analyze their experiences. As they protested, interviewees overwhelmingly experienced support from not only fellow protesters but also family members, teachers, administrators, and other community members. This connection formed with others helps foster a positive sense of self-esteem and self-worth central to identity development. There were no opposing or conflicting trends that emerged from this question. Across the board, protesters felt highly supported and secure in their decision to protest, even, given parents and friends who may have been opposed.

Beth Ann, one of the walk-out protesters and one of the Pennridge 225 who served Saturday detentions, felt "Some social pressure to protest from friends and classmates, especially when I knew I was going to be suspended. The support from friends made it much easier to walk out and deal with what was next".

Connie reported feeling as though she was part of a "Close knit campus community that was made closer by the fear of school shootings we heard about throughout the country. I felt very well supported and I know my friends felt the same way. We were anxious about our school record being tarnished but we felt euphoric when we walked out because of all the students that joined us". In addition, Connie reported "Making friends but also lost friends as a result of taking part in the protests".

Even though Doreen served detention on three consecutive Saturday mornings for participating in walkouts at her school, she felt "High levels of solidarity and support with people in my community. There were parents who brought pizza and snacks for students and then stood outside and cheered as we went in to serve detention. (Hollywood actress) Julianne Moore sent a letter to the school principle asking him to waive our detention penalty. It felt great having support from people around the country!"

Elizabeth felt "Mostly support from community members". However, "Despite open support from most protesters, there were still quite a lot of students who did not participate out of fear of repercussions. As I talked with other protesters at my school, we felt guilty about all of the attention we were receiving and possibly being a big disruption but mostly felt supported and positive about doing what we did".

Francine "Developed deep friendships and received extensive support from my friends, since my parents did not agree with my participation in the protests". Besides now seeing the necessity of empowering students in high school to help craft policies, Francine also "Sees higher levels of solidarity amongst protesters and progressive activists in 2020 as a result of the protests in 2018".

Jessica experienced "Hand-holding, hugs, lots of love and support – always. We would even bring snacks and water to protests whenever they happened so we could hand them out to fellow protesters. I get an amazing feeling of unity, connection, and accomplishment from participating in protests then and now and want to share the good feelings with everyone. Now in college I still introduce friends to protest activities. It all began with those (MFOL) protests when I was in high school.

Gregory had parents who full supported his decision to walk out of school in protest and serve detention as a result. What made him feel supported were the "Messages of support and endorsement from neighbors, extended family, and celebrities in social media. Then, being invited to [Washington] D.C. for the larger national protest and meeting the survivors from Parkland. It was weird going from being a high school kid to feeling like a celebrity all of a sudden. Based on those experiences, I knew I had more to do so I started a Snapchat group for protesters that had topics like how to talk with people about your position, how to defuse conflict, and how to stay safe when protesting. There was a real need to support people on an ongoing basis, especially if we were going to change minds".

Henry expanded his social and friend groups: I made lots of new friendships in the movement because of these protests but something I never expected to happen was making friends with local and state legislators. Even my principal and a couple of members of the school board contacted me and I feel like we're friends now, which is really a random feeling. I mean I like it but I never expected to be friends with adults like this".

Research Question Five: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement?

This final research question was asked to determine protester's sense of self in relation to people who opposed their position on gun violence, school shootings, and protest in general. A surprising theme that emerged was in the perception of protesters as to who made up the counter protesters most of the time and the force behind their position: 'Toxic, white male masculinity' was mentioned during frequent interviews as a force opposed to protesters. Other trends that emerged included: High levels of tolerance and open-mindedness and a reconciling of personality and position.

Toxic Masculinity

Doreen saw counter protesters and people opposed to gun control in a different light: "There seems to be an aggressive, male-driven fear to preserve what you know and that's it. Different ideas are not welcome". MFOL had a very fair and even way of communicating whether it was online, in social media, in speeches, or in op-eds but people did not want to hear it because they were dug into positions long ago. I gave up fighting with them because I feel the point of protest is lost when you engage in fights".

Jessica has learned to embrace change and the challenge of protest: "I love being part of change and I don't think my generation will stop and I think it important that we understand each other from that perspective. My school district did a good job removing the politics from the issue and I did receive some backlash from people close to me but I'm not going to respond on social media when I'm confronted. The reality was that the most negative responses I got were probably from young, tenth grade boys who think gun ownership is a sign of masculinity. Let them think that…I really don't have the time for that".

Kathleen saw the reactions of the "Other side" as: "Empowered by toxic masculinity. I mean, I welcome debate but some of these men just wanted to posture and be aggressive when what we needed was conversation". Gregory echoed these concerns: "Much of the violence we deal with in American society is a direct result of toxic masculinity found just about everywhere. I'm not sure how to counter it but I try to move out of my own social media bubble in order to talk with people. Engaging online has limited positive results, so whenever possible, I just talk to people".

High Levels of Tolerance

Beth Ann reported entering into the protests with an "Open mind and someone who is tolerant of different points of view. I knew from my family upbringing that there are a wide variety of views on this issue. My dad is very pro-gun and we disagreed a lot and still do, but that never kept me from going out and protesting against guns. I don't think our relationship suffered as a result but we still feel the same".

Reconciling of Personality and Position

Connie had a somewhat mixed feeling about counter protest at her school: "I feel communication is the answer to all of our problems. I mean, not every confrontational situation is an argument. Not every disagreement has to be an aggressive thing". After a long pause, she concluded: "I'm trying to balance how I feel about people opposed to gun control because I'm trying to work on not having as much hate inside me when it comes to other people".

Abraham agreed with counter protesters often and felt: MFOL needed an appeal with greater empathy. Honoring students who perished should have been the main focus and they could have kept the politics out of it".

Elizabeth felt opposition in a variety of places in her life: "I was interviewed by the local newspaper after the protests and was really stressed out by those interviews. I found myself concerned with the words I was saying and how it would be understood by someone on the opposite side". She also saw "A big, noticeable divide at protest events between people who wanted to end violence in schools and people who saw it as a threat. There were never any physical confrontations but it was unnerving having people always present who opposed your position. It felt difficult to do that". Because of these experiences, Elizabeth feels: "Terms like 'The other side' are counterproductive in terms of addressing the issue of gun control and gun

violence. We need to include absolutely everyone in the conversation if we are going to make a change".

Francine also experienced strong emotions from people outside of the movement: "I felt friends who did not hold the same views were very spiteful towards me for participating in these marches. Some of friends and I were able to sit down and have productive discussions but I can't help but feel that most people really lack the desire to reach out and actually talk. Good, productive, and intellectual discussions are harder and harder to have. I'm not sure if it's because of cancel culture or technology but I think counter protesting is just another way of avoiding discussions, in my eyes".

Conclusion

These findings provided me with a rich source of data to conduct a thematic and structural narrative analysis. Through these interviews, I was able to receive extended accounts of protester experiences that provided the genesis of individual positions, motivations, relationships, and perspectives. I also discovered units for analysis which helped focus my analysis. Finally, from a thematic and structural analysis narrative viewpoint, I revealed and attended to specific contexts, which provided me with individual orientations, actions, evaluations, and resolutions on the issues of identity, guns, protest, and personal salience. These findings also revealed a linkage to personal political salience and an extension of protest activity beyond just the MFOL movement.

Findings

The primary finding of this study (Which addressed the first research question) was that participant identities were formed by embracing a sense of openness to new activities such as protest. Often, participants did not have underlying awareness of the issues they were protesting

and explored them through participation in protest. Their sense of identity was formed through continued parental support, and a need for understanding a complex and challenging issue that may have affected them or may still affect them as adults. Finally, participant identities were formed through an embrace of intersectionality or by participants recognizing the interconnectedness of issues, people, policy, along with structural violence in American society.

The study's second finding (Addressed through the second research question) was that participants viewed the March for Our Lives (MFOL) movement through a variety of lenses. In connection to a concept covered in the first research question, participants viewed protest as a new activity and an opportunity to learn more about a vexing and potentially personal issue that might affect their personal safety. Participants also saw MFOL as a form of student empowerment or a means for young people to bring order and stability to their lives through this protest activity. Participants saw MFOL as a source of solidarity and connection with students at the local and national level. Partly due to connections made through social media, participants built greater empathy and see socioeconomic and other structural similarities between them and high school students located thousands of miles away. Finally, participants saw MFOL as an opportunity for growth, learning, and connection. Here, students were approaching the issues of gun violence in a pragmatic manner as they would a class or extracurricular activity.

The third finding on what motivated them to join the movement revealed five key motivators: First, most participants in this study were motivated out a sense of respect they felt for students and teachers killed in school shootings. Second, an emotional reaction of fear was a motivator for engaging in protest. Students drew direct connections between themselves and victims of school shootings around the United States. In addition, students feared for their safety and the safety of loved ones. Often, students were simply sick of the levels of gun violence in the

United States and wanted to break the inertia they felt older generations and political leaders were stuck in for far too long.

The fourth finding on what level of support participants in the movement experienced showed consistently high levels of support from friends, family members, and often from teachers, administrators, and other elected officials. Of all the research findings in this study, participants were most consistent on this finding. High levels of support and solidarity were also engendered through connections in social media along with in person interactions.

The fifth finding, which addressed the fifth research question was that participants viewed the counter protesters or people who did not share their viewpoint as driven by toxic, aggressive, male masculinity. Despite these high levels of aggression related to the issues of gun ownership, gun violence in schools, and policies that influence structural violence, participants reported high levels of tolerance and forbearance when interacting with or relating to counter protesters. Often, students found parents or close friends on the opposing side, so many reported treading lightly when attempting to influence or educate on gun control and gun violence. Finally, participants reconciled their personality and position based on their experience of encountering counter protesters. Sometimes, it forced them to review their position, or improve their argument, or take the path of least resistance and avoid the counter protesters altogether, especially in online interactions.

Chapter five will summarize the main findings and interpret them through the study's conceptual framework, including how the findings are in the literature by connecting the results to the gaps identified in the literature review. I will close by discussing recommendations based on the study's findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study used thematic and structural narrative analysis to examine protester identity development, their participation in a nonviolent social movement designed to curtail gun violence in their community, and how they saw their sense of self develop while engaging in protest activity. Because of this analysis, I hoped to connect identity to personal political salience and participation in a social movement and working to impact gun control legislation over the long term to affect change at the legislative and cultural level. In this section, I will summarize the main findings and interpret them through the study's conceptual framework, which brings together three distinct threads including culturist perspective, frame theory, and structural violence. I will also describe the limitations of the study and offer recommendations for practitioners and scholars.

Summary of Findings

Table 8

Research Questions, Interview Topics, and Emergent Themes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW TOPICS	EMERGENT THEMES
RQ1: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement?	Protester Identity	• Open-ness • Parental support • Understanding • Intersectionality
RQ 2: How did protesters view the MFOL movement?	Protester Perceptions of MFOL movement	• Protest as a new idea • Protest as a form of student empowerment • Protest as a form of solidarity and connection • Protest as an opportunity for growth, learning, and connection
RQ3: What motivated them to join the MFOL movement?	Protester Motivations	• Out of respect for victims of other school shootings • Fear

		• Reactions from teachers and administrators at their school • Reactions from family and friends about protest activity • Predisposition to protest
RQ4: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they marched, and after marches?	Protester Relationships and Support with Other Protesters	High levels of support and connection throughout • legitimacy, power, information, and energy.
RQ5: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement?	Protester Connections and Perceptions Through social media	• Toxic masculinity • High levels of tolerance for opposing viewpoints • Reconciling personality and position based on feedback

Interpretation of Findings

Seventeen distinct themes emerged because of the analysis of interviews conducted for this study. In this section, I will analyze how the emergent themes addressed the research questions. The following section will place the emergent themes in the theoretical framework of this study. Then, I will address the gaps identified in the literature review followed by recommendations, limitations, and conclusions for this study.

Research questions and emergent themes: How themes informed the research questions

RQ1: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement?

The four defining characteristics of identity: openness, family support, understanding, and intersectionality clearly emerged as themes because of their importance to nearly all interviewees. As reported by interviewees, personal identity was mostly established before engaging with the MFOL movement. This is evident in the first emergent theme related to this question, openness. The interviewees for this study were all in high school when they first engaged with MFOL and approached the movement with a sense of genuine openness, curiosity

and willingness to learn. Many interviewees reported knowing little or nothing about guns, gun violence in America, the gun culture that exists, or about the Second Amendment. The extent of their knowledge was there were mass shootings at schools and because of the shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school, there would be protests on a nationwide level. However, this sense of openness and willingness to engage with new ideas was more of a reinforcement of their role as students, especially given where the protest activity was occurring: in their own schools.

Second, the high levels of parental support reported also reinforced an existing identity. Interviewees consistently reported high levels of support and endorsement from parents, adults, teachers, and others in their communities. Most striking were the levels of support from parents even when the parent did not agree with the child's position on guns and violence. Only one participant reported a clear and ongoing disagreement with a parent because of their participation in the MFOL protest. This high level of confirmation and endorsement provides an ideal environment for self-concept and identity to be reinforced and allowed to grow.

Understanding was a third theme that emerged during interviews. As young people opened themselves up to learn more about the mass shootings that have occurred in the United States, they reported spending significant time to research, discuss, and learn about the variety of perspectives, issues, and positions that exist in relation to the issue of gun violence and mass shootings. 'Understanding' in this sense was expressed as a need to approach the issues of school shootings and gun violence in more or less an academic way. Many interviewees articulated an objective perspective, even when they felt the growing threat of school shootings and reported staying that way, even today. Interviewees also responded to how this understanding led them to develop relationships with people who shared and did not share their position in almost an equal

proportion. This theme of understanding the issues surrounding school shootings, gun violence, and the gun culture in America led to the following emergent theme of intersectionality.

The final theme to emerge from interviews related to the first research question was that of intersectionality. The term 'intersectionality' was mentioned frequently by respondents in three contexts. First, as an idea that became apparent to them quickly once they researched this issue and interact with people on 'both sides' of the issue. As students, they quickly saw the connections between people in the community and the variety of viewpoints and positions held on this issue. Even within their families, interviewees reported learning about the overlapping positions and diverging viewpoints quickly. Second, the intersectionality of race, poverty, social justice, and gun violence was a frequent discussion point. Perhaps because of the timing of these interviews, held after a contentious summer and fall of 2020 when Black Lives Matter protests and counter protests sprung up around the U.S. followed by a highly contested election season that saw the presidential election results not determined until early December. Whatever the case, interviewees saw clear connections between guns, poverty, and violence. Some even mentioned the structural embeddedness of these issues. Third, respondents used the issue of intersectionality as they speculated about the future of the gun control movement. Many made the case that gun violence cannot decrease unless there is greater social justice and a reduction in poverty in the United States.

RQ2: How did protesters view the MFOL movement?

Four themes emerged from this interview question: Protest and MFOL were viewed as a new idea, protest with MFOL was viewed as a form of student empowerment, protest was a form of solidarity and connection with students across the globe, and protest was an opportunity for growth, learning, and connection.

In the previous section, there were high levels of newness to these protests and the ideas it brought with it. Sometimes, protesters heard stories of protests their family members participated in and sometimes, protesters joined of their own free will because the idea behind gun control legislation appealed to them simply for their personal safety. The novelty of walking out of school, whether sanctioned or not, was a new idea that resonated with student protesters. Student protesters said they knew little about protest and sometimes, little about gun violence. The newness of the act of protest resonated with these young people. When asked if they would encourage a younger sibling or friend to participate in a protest or school walk out, the majority said they would and that the penalties of detention or even expulsion were worth it, especially if it is something one feels strongly about. This comment connects to the second emergent theme of protest viewed as a form of student empowerment.

Participation in MFOL movements was cited by participants as a form of student empowerment again and again in my interviews. This sense of empowerment is connected to motivation and direction when someone is forging their identity. In certain instances, students discussed a shared sense of power with teachers and administrators which made it easy to participate in a protest or walk out. Where there was little support or even highly punitive penalties, student protesters saw this as a necessary risk so their sense of empowerment was high. On a socio-political level, it is important to note these student protesters stood to lose much more than they gained by participating in these protests. Many protesters were juniors or seniors in high school and risked a mark on their permanent record for participating in these marches that may have negatively affected their eligibility for their choice of college, scholarships, or group membership. These student protesters were under the voting age which meant they lacked the political clout to impact legislative change. This sense of empowerment was an important

catalyst to get protesters politically active. When I asked if they voted in the 2020 election, nine of the ten respondents voted and mentioned they were all waiting anxiously to vote when they protested in 2018.

The third emergent theme was that protesters participated in MFOL to show solidarity and support for other students and victims of gun violence. Along the same lines as the theme of intersectionality, protesters saw similarities to the shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, FL with high schools in southeastern Pennsylvania. Not only did students see the same aged students gunned down but they saw similar young people dealing with the overwhelming grief associated with surviving a horrific event like a mass shooting. In addition, protesters saw marked similarities from a socioeconomic perspective and from the perspective of a suburban school district one assumes is insulated from the horrors of gun violence. Students that protested and sat for interviews for this study saw themselves and younger siblings as potential targets of gun violence in their school, family, or community. Protesters saw this as an opportunity to speak out, show support, and hopefully break the spiral of violence they saw American society trapped in during 2018.

The final theme related to perception was that protest would lead to an opportunity for opportunity for growth, learning, and connection. Much like the need to understand this complex and contested issue, many protesters interviewed saw this as a growth opportunity as an internship or service learning activity is a growth opportunity. Some protesters saw this as a logical extension of their personality in the sense they are opinionated, or politically minded, or that they enjoy organizing events. Others saw this as an opportunity to engage with other people and extend their circle of friends and contacts not only throughout their school and immediate community but also around the country. This finding was somewhat surprising to this researcher.

I was not considering that protest of a significant social issue could be viewed as an extension of a school club or activity but it was exactly how protesters were viewing this event. Again, this may be due to the school context in which the protest was taking place. Logically, students would engage with such an event, especially if it was sanctioned, organized, and took place on school property.

RQ 3: What motivated them to join the MFOL movement?

Four themes emerged that address this research question: Protesters joined this movement out of respect for victims of other school shootings, fear, reactions from teachers and administrators at their school, reactions from family and friends about protest activity, and predisposition to protest.

How protesters viewed MFOL and the motivations for participating in protest with MFOL were closely aligned. The first theme of respect for victims of other school shootings was by far the most frequently mentioned aspect of protest. This deep sense of empathy and concern for others resonated as the main motive for protesters in this movement. More than working to convince or cajole others, protesters – even those who held strong anti-gun control positions – felt the need to protest to memorialize and recognize people they shared something in common with. Perhaps because acknowledgement and recognition of those fallen has become commonplace in a post 9/11 America and perhaps because of the fact these protests took place in school, there was a need to be respectful and mindful of others. Another factor in this category could have been how the protests in Parkland, FL were staged as memorials for victims of the shooting in February 2018. Whatever the case, interviewees all articulated a high level of sensitivity and respect for their fellow students and it influenced them to join into a larger

movement they had little knowledge of and involved a certain amount of personal and academic risk.

The second theme to emerge related to motivation was that protesters felt a high level of fear that a mass shooting would take place at either their school or at the school of a family member or friend. The steady cascade of horrific shootings that occurred starting in Sandy Hook, CT in 2012 and up to Marjorie Stoneman Douglas in Parkland, FL in 2018 were referenced by interviewees frequently. This fear was fed more by students communicating during the school day rather than a steady diet of news from social media platforms. Contrary to popular perception, protesters used social media more as a tool to organize their protest activities once they committed to protest. As interviewees described it, students shared stories, news and events related to shootings in person and conducted research about those events and topics related to gun ownership and violence online and out of school. This emotional, visceral reaction to school shootings in the United States led to high levels of tension that then led to the protests nationwide during the spring of 2018. In addition, the emotional content of the protests, speeches, sit-ins and related activities was especially high and reflected in many protests around the country. The powerful, emotional speeches by Emma Gonzales after the Parkland shootings was frequently mentioned as a motivator by interviewees.

Third, the reactions of teachers, families, and friends to the protests was another motivator. This was articulated in two ways by interviewees. First, protesters were motivated to protest because of the negative reactions of some parents, teachers, school administrators, or community members. That negative reaction provided sufficient motivation to risk detention or worse academic penalties, censure or other penalties from family members, or perhaps be ostracized by peers and classmates. Interviewees would often call themselves "Opinionated" or

"Strong willed" referring to how others perceived them and, often, gladly took up the mantle of protest. Sometimes, protesters were surprised by the positions taken by someone in their lives and protested based on that new information. Protesters also experienced a variety of negative responses from teachers and administrators before, during and after protests.

The second way protesters were motivated to participate was by the positive reactions of parents, teachers, and administrators and members of the community. This positive feedback came in tacit support such as being driven to protest activities after being encouraged by parents to outright endorsement from parents and family members. Often, parents had a background that included high levels of political participation and protest activity. This positive reinforcement and normalization of protest was frequently mentioned by interviewees as the main way they became and stayed motivated to participate in this movement. Interviewees were not looking to be reactive and negative in their approach and when they received endorsement from parents and significant others, their commitment grew stronger. Related to this category was the support the protesters who participated in the Pennridge 225 protests received from parents, celebrities, and community members because of their activities while serving detention. During multiple detentions served on Saturdays because of their unsanctioned walk-out protest, protesters held silent protests for the entire detention while sharing pictures of victims of school shootings. Videos of this protest during detention went viral and were endorsed by celebrities on numerous social media platforms. In addition, letters were written by celebrities such as actress Julianne Moore to the principal of the Pennridge School District asking him to rescind the Saturday detention penalty for protesters. Besides the celebrity endorsements that accompanied the Saturday detention protests, interviewees reported that family members and fellow students would be present at the drop off and pick up during the Saturday detentions and provide cheers,

hugs, and sometimes, food. This strong, positive endorsement helped drive motivations for participation in the MFOL movement and deepen commitment by protesters for activity in the future.

Finally, interviewees mentioned a predisposition to protest as a key factor. As expressed by many interviewees, they felt a predisposition to protest even, given the newness of protest and the newness of the subject of guns, school shootings, and gun violence in the U.S. Interviewees reported that once they took the step to protest, it felt natural and right to them as individuals and they wanted to continue taking an active role or even a leadership role. In three cases, interviewees reported previous experiences with protest or participation in activities at school that led to them organizing events at their school. In many interviews, protesters found this activity to be satisfying, challenging – in the positive sense – and highly gratifying. "Surprise" was a frequent theme that emerged from the discussion of motivations. Protesters were surprised to discover how good they were at the parts of protest from communication, to organization, and supporting other protesters emotionally. Protesters discovered a hidden disposition because of taking the first step towards MFOL.

RQ 4: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they marched, and after marches?

For other research questions in this study, several sub-themes developed. For this research question, only one theme emerged, and that was unanimous feelings of support as protesters prepared, while they marched (Or walked out), and after the marches. The system of high support and connection at all stages of protest was a key aspect for several reasons articulated by protesters: legitimacy, power, information, and energy.

Because they were new to protest, unfamiliar with MFOL and gun violence generally, and because they were high-school students, protesters knew were they going to have legitimacy in the eyes of the power structure (Fellow students who did not share their viewpoint, teachers, administrators, and sometimes members of the school board) at their school they would need to support one another throughout the entire process. Strength in numbers was the central operating paradigm of these protesters and it was also fostered at the national level where protesters participated in one of the largest coordinated protests of all time.

Protesters also knew that because of their age, they would lack the power to impact change at the legislative level and that they would have to have some legitimacy and credibility with their position, so a show of strength through numbers helped make their case. Interviewees frequently spoke of the need to know the facts and to not speak without knowing what they were talking about because they would be perceived as not having power and credibility due to their age. Their power, credibility, and persuasion were built by turning out in large numbers to support one another.

Accurate and reliable information is required if a movement will coordinate activities and present a persuasive and credible message to the general public and protesters in this movement felt it was a necessary component that provided direction and helped the movement achieve a high level of success. Another aspect of information is that it provided a sense of connection, inclusion, and inspiration for protesters in this movement. Protesters reported feeling high levels of camaraderie and connection as they shared videos, posts, and news face to face and online contexts.

Faced with the horrific physical violence of mass shootings, consistent outreach and support were needed within this movement. Protesters did not see the victims of this violence in

an abstract, aloof, or objective way. Having access to videos and graphic news accounts made

the terrible mass shootings real and visceral for these protesters. This is why they felt the need to

provide positive feedback and energy within their movement. Besides the physical contact such

as hugs, hand-holding, and closeness, protesters focused on providing a positive and uplifting

message so as not to get too bogged down in the negativity of violence and death associated with

this issue.

RQ 5: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement?

Three themes emerged clearly because of this research question: Toxic masculinity, high

levels of tolerance for opposing viewpoints, and reconciling personality and position based on

feedback. Interactions with counter protesters and people who disagreed with MFOL positions

were of special interest for this study. The reflected self-appraisal that feeds identity

development works in relationship to negative feedback, hence the question. The most frequent

theme that emerged through interviews when this question was posed was the especially high

levels of toxic masculinity (TM) protesters encountered. Pearson (2019, p. 1257) defines toxic

masculinity as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination,

the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence". Protesters pointed towards TM

in a variety of contexts related to protest: From behaviors they saw in males such as fathers or

brothers in their household, to male classmates who opposed their position on guns and gun

violence, to men in their communities and to elected male officials who opposed their position.

Protesters recognized this behavior as part of the territory when protesting gun ownership and

advocating for gun control. However, protesters also saw the effects of TM as part of mass

shootings that occurred throughout the 2010s. That protesters discussed TM when asked about

their reaction to how other saw them speaks volumes to the effect this dangerous behavior had on

them. The frequency and context of this behavior affected protesters both male and female as they grappled with perceptions others had of the MFOL movement. As many protesters described it, they were surprised at the obviously high levels of TM in both in person and mediated contexts.

Despite perceived high levels of TM and opposition from a wide swath of the community, protesters articulated high levels of tolerance for opposing viewpoints that did not mesh with theirs. The sense of openness that was present as protesters entered into the world of nonviolent social protest was present while they were engaging with people who did not agree with their position. Protesters were respectful and chose whether to engage carefully during protests, in social media platforms, and in their own families. Nonviolent protest principles served the protesters well as they maintained a positive approach while working to decrease violence in their school, community, and country. Interviewees also mentioned being very careful in how they engaged with people in social media platforms. While many reported using social media to communicate, coordinate, and support other protesters, they frequently mentioned avoiding confrontations and fights in online settings. To many, it felt counterproductive and a waste of time to convince others in online venues. Many interviewees said they preferred to enter into dialogues with people they cared for when they disagreed. This perspective was surprising, given the popular perception that young people use social media exclusively as a communication tool when debating and discussing with others. Finally, many found person to person, ideally face to face, as the best way to discuss and to persuade those who did not agree with them.

Finally, reconciling personality and position based on feedback was the third theme that emerged from this research question. This move of identity reconciliation follows many themes

that have emerged during the analysis of interviews such as openness and respect. Interviewees reported being very adept to adjust and revise their position based on feedback they received from others as they protested with MFOL. Many reported the steep learning curve involved with knowing nothing about a contested social issue then being immersed in it quickly. Others reported broadening their perspective through research and critical thinking. The range of issues associated with gun violence was also a factor in how interviewees calibrated their position.

The importance of maintaining a sense of focus was also a strategic consideration many reported making. A wide variety of issues intermingle related to guns: Gun ownership, gun violence, school shootings, bullying in schools, availability of guns in the community, access and purchasing of guns at gun shows, school safety, arming teachers in schools, active shooter drills, and even student rights within schools. Given the range of diversionary issues that come up when one thinks of guns, it makes sense that protesters would want to be well informed but also focused in their position and responses to others. Finally, some protesters found themselves thrust into the public spotlight and learned to be careful with their words and ideas. Two protesters reported learning this when they were interviewed for the local newspaper. They both felt high levels of pressure to communicate a clear message and also persuade others. They placed high value on being accurate and fair in how they approached the topic when speaking to the newspaper reporter and this forced them to research and reconsider their position, given new evidence.

The seventeen themes that emerged from the research questions in this study interestingly picture young people in crucial life and identity development work while participating in controversial and challenging protests that generated attention, controversy, and conflict. The

next section of this study will connect these seventeen emergent themes to the three theoretical

perspectives of the culturist perspective, framing theory, and structural violence.

Emergent themes in the theoretical framework

In this section, I will briefly summarize the three theoretical underpinnings for this study

and then review the seventeen themes, given each. In the following section, I will address the

gaps identified by the literature review and discuss the themes, given those gaps. This study will

close with a discussion of limitations and conclude with recommendations for steps going

forward.

Three theoretical perspectives were employed to guide this work: The culturist or social

constructivist approach, framing theory, and structural violence. First, the culturist approach to

identity rests upon the assumptions articulated by social constructionists in that one's sense of

self is built with others, throughout interactions. Language, non-verbal communication, and

communication through mediated channels help one form their sense of who they are. By Berger

and Luckmann in Bergen and Braithwaite (2009) Bergen and Braithwaite (2009, p. 167), "The

reality of everyday life further presents itself to me as an intersubjective world, a world that I

share with others…Indeed, I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and

communicating with others". That communication occurs within a culture that is dynamic, fluid,

and exerts pressure onto individuals as they build that sense of self. In this study, a culturist

perspective focuses on how protesters sense of self was influenced by their activity in the MFOL

movement.

Closely related to the socially constructed culturist approach is frame theory. Frames are

"mental structures that shape the way we see the world" (G. Lakoff, 2014) and provide an

important context in which identity is constructed, negotiated, and presented. Frames convey

values and provide a structure to communicate ideas. This study was focused on the role individual framing played when building identity in MFOL. This case provided an excellent context to study how protesters navigated the dynamic two-way nature of protesting a controversial social issue which employed framing to convey a persuasive message but also how individuals used frames to construct and convey their own personal identity. In this study, the social construction of identity is linked to culture and framing.

The third theoretical foundation for this study used Galtung's structural and cultural violence to position gun violence appropriately so it fit within this study. The MFOL protests occurred within the social and structural constraints of an American society that has made protecting Second Amendment rights a priority, even, given horrific shootings in schools, universities, shopping malls, theaters, churches, and concerts. Protesters for MFOL articulated struggling with the ideas of pushing for change while maintaining individual rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution. To understand how MFOL protesters constructed their identity, the gun culture and the structural violence present in American culture could not be ignored. It is within the context of these three theoretical perspectives I will discuss the seventeen emergent themes of this study. For organization and clarity, I will discuss the themes revealed in relation to each research question.

RQ1: How were protester identities shaped and influenced by the MFOL movement?

Emergent themes: Open-ness, parental support, understanding, intersectionality.

Culturist or Social Constructivist Perspective

Exploration of ideas and roles, questioning authority, and empathy were all present in this set of emergent themes related to identity development. The themes all aligned with the work articulated by Marcia (in Berzonsky, 2018) that explained the processes of identity development,

including achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. Protesters were actively seeking alternatives to form commitments so they could set meaningful goals, build their own set of values, beliefs and roles, which signal successful achievement of identity. There was a strong value orientation that linked ideology to protesters sense of self which led to greater personal political salience that continues to this day three years after the awful events in Parkland, FL. Often, protesters in this study discovered the prevailing ideology surrounding gun control and protest only after they explored protest. There was a strong sense of investigation before protesters 'bought in' to an ideology that lent itself to questioning authority and protesting. This interplay of identity and ideology and how protesters fit their identity into the prevailing ideology surrounding protests (Hall, 2018 and Black, 2003) was an interesting development in this study.

Frame Theory

The interconnectedness of students and protest is omnipresent in how protester identity was framed this study. Because of protests on school grounds, during school, and sanctioned – or not – by school authorities, which meant the activity may have been contested and protesters penalized, means the frames constructed and the identity markers used were strongly influenced by their role as student first. This contestation of frames and markers was articulated by Zeira (2018) as he examined how the structure of education determined the level of protest activity. The work of Compton (2019) and how individuals questioned the efficacy of their individual frame identities informs this idea. Protesters in this study saw themselves as students first, not as protesters first. Therefore, their behaviors such as their levels of openness, understanding, and empathy all happening with high levels of parental support shows how deeply rooted this activity was in education first and in nonviolent civil disobedience second. Protest activity on school

grounds during school hours with approval (usually) by administrators and parents served as a 'dress rehearsal' for many of these protesters. That the protests occurred in the safety of school gave protesters the confidence to protest again in larger, more public settings. This frame alignment (Snow, 1988) provided the linkage of interests, values, and beliefs with the social movement activity, goals, and ideology to provide high levels of motivation, even for people who never thought much about gun violence or protesting.

Structural and Cultural Violence

The totality of this MFOL movement operated in a cultural context that provided a unifying structure for protesters. Protesters saw themselves as connected to other students around the country and saw striking similarities between each other. As they considered the suburban location of many of their schools, Socio-economic similarities, and the local political landscape, protesters saw themselves operating in similar structural and cultural contexts. This unified protesters because as the protesters in suburban Philadelphia looked at Parkland, FL, they observed numerous similarities which led them to think a mass shooting could just as easily occur at their school. This connection between student protesters already operating within the structural context of a school system along with the major structures of life including family and political systems was an interesting sub-theme in this study. These social realities became quickly apparent to protesters once they began their activities. These structurally and culturally embedded beliefs, norms, and practices fed into their sense of self and continue to do so.

RQ2: How did protesters view the MFOL movement?

Emergent themes: Protest as a new idea**,** protest as a form of student empowerment**,** protest as a form of solidarity and connection**,** protest as an opportunity for growth, learning, and connection.

Culturist or Social Constructivist Perspective

Given the newness of protest and the setting for the protests, it is little wonder that

protester perceptions were focused and narrow and MFOL was not a primary focus for them. The

perception the protesters had of the movement and their role in the movement was heavily

influenced by setting the protests and their self-perceived role as student first, protester second.

Protesters saw themselves "As part of a group, cognitively, emotionally, and morally" (Jasper,

2014), but not primarily as part of a broad, nationwide protest or even as thrusting themselves

into America's culture wars. Rather, protesters operated strongly within the identity status

framework set for by Marcia (In Berzonsky, 2018). This perception of the movement and of self

fits within Mukherjee's (2015) "Catnetness" formula of the category (Cat) or the extent to which

participants belong to the same social categories and the network (Net) or the density of group

relationships. With protesters interviewed for my study, they had high levels of both Cat and Net

but the focus was within their own localized community and school district and not with the

broader MFOL movement. This may be a consideration for social movements generally. Much

like politics, social movements can be primarily local. Localism was also articulated by

McVeigh, Cunningham, and Farrell (2014) and Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1980).

Frame Theory

Mobilization and demonstration characteristics were framed mostly in the local and

personal sense. Sometimes, as illustrated by the emergent themes for this question, protest was

treated almost as an extra-curricular or experiential activity. There were similarities to the

empowerment narrative on MFOL online communications (Marchforourlives.com) and with the

theme of solidarity and communication. This overlap between the movement, prevailing

ideology, and protest activities as studied by Bloemraad, Silva, and Voss (2016) is an important

consideration when looking to persuade the broader population. A de-centralized, grassroots movement loosely supported looks like an effective model for organizing and persuading others.

Structural and Cultural Violence

When considering the role of structure and culture on how protesters perceived MFOL, concepts from Melucci (Vahabzadeh, 2001) may guide our thinking, especially, the collapse of the distinction between public and private spheres. Here, the emergent themes in this section point towards a protest activity that straddled the public, private, and political spheres. Because of the setting and context of these protests, protesters brought a private political ideology into a public setting and provide a vehicle for debate and contestation while exploring personal growth and development of identity. This 'mash-up' of public and private spheres has happened apace thanks to the expansion of social networking platforms throughout the world. As illustrated in Cremin and Guilherme (2016), schools are heavily contested spaces with conflict over class size, class content and textbook, dress codes, civility, standardized testing, and academic freedom. Zeira (2018) maps additional identity markers such as education and socioeconomic class as they relate to protest participation. The article's findings challenge perspectives on educated/non-educated, employed/unemployed, and poor/marginalized individuals. The approach and the audience make Zeira's (2018) study relevant to mine. Zeira (2018) does not analyze the content of education as it relates to protest. Rather, he examines the structure of education and how an anti-regime orientation and low internal organizational strength are the key determinants of protest activity. Since my study is focused on protest activity of children in high school and elementary school, the connection is clear. The open, democratic structure of school systems fostered protest, helped keep it peaceful, and was the key factor in keeping it safe for student protesters.

RQ 3: What motivated them to join the MFOL movement?

Emergent themes: Out of respect for victims of other school shootings**,** fear**,** reactions from teachers and administrators at their school, reactions from family and friends about protest activity, predisposition to protest.

Culturist or Social Constructivist Perspective

Emotions and perceptions were the key motivators the drove protester behavior, according to interviews conducted for this study. Protesters reported high levels of fear and concern for their safety in school as one of the main reasons for marching with MFOL. A strong sense of connection, solidarity, and respect were evident as motivators. Those interconnected feelings of fear and respect for victims of gun violence were key drivers and took a higher priority than wanting to impact change or persuade others. Emotionality was explored by Kashima, Coman, Pauketat, and Yzerbyt (2019) as they examined the connection between emotion, cultural dynamics, cultural change, and cultural evolution. Emotional generation, transmission, and interpretation is a highly subjective process that provides the grounding for identity search and the establishment of relationships. Emotions provide the bridging materials for people to form both identities and the social bonds that allow movements to connect and grow. Fear was a not a driving emotion that fostered violent protest. Rather, fear provided the social capital and cohesion needed to foster protest but more important healing within their own community and school.

These protests were driven by this almost intimate sense of emotion, care, and empathy more than youthful rebellion or pushing for significant social change. Even as protesters cited reactions from teachers, administrators and parents as motivation for joining the movement, there were always more positive messages reinforcing protest behavior. Bergstrand (2019, p. 1) studies

"how well social issues might fare in attracting public concern and activist attention" (p.1). Her study is grounded in the Affect Control Theory (ACT) to evaluate the potential differential appeal of movement grievances. This is an important study because it links grievances, protests, and morality with outcomes from a protest. This study relates to this theme because of the linkages to motivation, identity, values, and outcomes. Related to Bergstrand's (2019) work is a study by Skitka, Wisneski, and Brandt (2017) that looks at the relationship between attitude moralization and perceptions of harm and even intuition. Although it is primarily psychological, there is a connection to morality, perception, and motivation that ties to the protesters in this study.

Finally, in a study related to education and student perspectives, McMahon, Hoge, Johnson, and McMahon (2018) shows how training to encourage bystander intervention as part of their K-12 education results in a more positive sense of self. Intervening and standing up for one's rights has been a central tenet to the MFOL protests. More and more, students are empowered to stand up where, once upon a time, they were encouraged to remain passive and quiet. Protester behavior was in line with the training they received in anti-bullying and intervention training while in school. They demonstrated high emotional intelligence by prioritizing empathy and high concern for others first. This is an interesting outcome and created a paradox for students, protesters, educators and parents. On one hand, students may be encouraged to intervene when they see certain forms of social injustice such as bullying, suicidal talk, or sexual harassment and violence but are encouraged to remain silent when they want to protest gun violence in schools.

Frame Theory

Protesters motivation was framed around emotions and perceptions and not as part of a grand, sweeping social change narrative. Many noted how little they knew about school shootings and protest activity beforehand. This narrative framed the relationships they had with one another and moved a sincerity and genuineness that fed into the nonviolent aspect of the movement. A similar study that examines the intersections of free speech, threats, identity, and the cultivation of relationships, Fuller (2019) used interviews, grounded theory, and field work that spanned two years to examine how social context framed conflict between anti-abortion protesters and volunteers at a women's clinic. While his intended audiences are journalists, editors, and legal scholars, the methodology and framing of identities, relationships, and the social context in which free speech occurs is important to my study. Smith and Tryce (2019) broke national identity and national attachment into sub-dimensions such as uncritical patriotism, symbolic patriotism, and constructive patriotism while studying emerging adults' reactions to athlete activism. While this study is focused on external reactions to protest activities, the identity markers identified (nationalism and patriotism) along with the ages of the individuals studied makes this paper relevant to my project. The quantitative work of Smith and Tryce (2019) provide clear evidence that many emerging adult-related behaviors are affected by significant national attachments, or their national identity and patriotism. Compton (2019) used interviews to examine the interplay between frames, identity, and interpersonal interactions with protest movements. Three identity gaps were identified: (1) enacted and relational frames, (2) an altering of individual identities to engage in protest behaviors, and (3) a questioning of the efficacy of their individual frame identities in relation to the protest activity. The identity gap in

the third point specially interests my study. Protesters in this study framed their identity

appropriately and aligned it with the nonviolent aspects of the movement perfectly.

Structural and Cultural Violence

On the surface, the MFOL movement benefitted from a grassroots and decentralized

structure. But was it decentralized? The open access infrastructure of school systems provided

ample opportunities for students to connect, organize, and often, coordinate with teachers and

administrators to help with their protest. In one instance, a protester interviewed for this study

was already active in the Social Justice club and encouraged by her school's principal to

organize the walk-out at her school. School systems also provided the proximity and ease of

protesting in a secure location and with more safety than when in the general public. An

excellent example of the power of proximity is seen in McVeigh, Cunningham, and Farrell

(2014) who conducted a mixed methods study that analyzed county-level data while examining

outcomes of social movements through Ku Klux Klan activity in the south between 1960 to

2000. I chose this study because the authors demonstrated that a radical and highly visible social

movement can have an enduring impact on voting outcomes. As we have seen in previous

studies, proximity plays a key part in influence of the movement. The markers of identity are not

only important to consider but outcomes in connection to the movement are central to this study.

Lessons can be learned from social movements no matter where they land on the political

spectrum. Klandermans and Oegema (1987) studied mobilization potential among members of

the Dutch peace movement and found that nonparticipation is based on four grounds: (1) lack of

sympathy for the movement, (2) not being the target of a mobilization attempt, (3) not being

motivated, and (4) the presence of barriers. Lack of social links created a significant barrier for

potential participants. Those formal and informal social links and the role they play in getting

individuals to join and participate in a NSM is a topic in my study. D. A. Snow, Zurcher, and

Ekland-Olson (1980) focused on recruitment into social movements and found that structural

proximity, availability, and affective interaction with movement members helped individuals join

or not. For the MFOL protests, location, ease, and safety provided the structural and cultural

supports necessary for the movement to make an impact.

RQ 4: How did protesters support one another as they prepared for protests, while they

marched, and after marches?

Emergent themes: High levels of support and connection throughout.

Culturist or Social Constructivist Perspective

Support and connection were prevalent themes throughout the interviews for this study.

At every step of the way, protesters sought connections, fostered connection, and made new

friends and built relationships that continue to be in place three years later. This behavior is

consistent in studies that examined the role of Black student leaders at a Predominantly White

Institution (PWI) who used student activism to foster connections with other students and

community member off campus Jones (2017). The value of connections and how they manifest

themselves can be seen again and again in studies in diverse settings such as Hong Kong (Lee,

2014 and Ruhlig 2017), Turkey (Johnston, 2019), and Israel (Lev-On, 2018).

Frame Theory

The persistent theme that emerged on this question of connection and support is directly

tied to the message framing used by protesters in MFOL. Rather than employ a rights frame or

an economic frame (Blomeraad, Silva, & Voss, 2016), MFOL promoted a frame of support,

solidarity, and connection. This framing aligned with not only the nonviolent nature of this

campaign but also the healing and support needed, given the awful circumstances from which

these protests arose. Identity framing influences dispositions. For example, as illustrated in Merino (2018), he examines gun ownership and identity and the intersection of religious identity, gun ownership, and support for gun ownership policies is valuable information when working to persuade and form compromises around legislative and cultural agendas. Interestingly, this study reveals that white, evangelical, Protestants favor individualistic solutions and place more emphasis on religious values in their social surroundings. These individualistic solutions align perfectly with gun ownership to protect family, home, and possessions. No matter the social issue, be it abortion (Fuller 2019), high levels of ethnic nationalism (Smith and Tyce, 2019), or access to education (McVeigh, et. al., 2014), the linkage between frame and identity within the movement matters with the outcomes of the movement. Violent frames beget violent protests. Peaceful, healing frames beget nonviolent protests that connect and heal.

Structural and Cultural Violence

Drawing heavily on the social construction of the individual in protest from Touraine, King (2006) shows how protesters transcend restraining social structures, norms, and roles to create a new social order. She shows how de-integration involves developing skills in self-reflection. This practice of emotional reflexivity and re-evaluation counseling – whereby protesters support and counsel one another outside of protest activity – was a key structure created within the MFOL cohort I interviewed. The protesters interviewed for this study know of the structural and cultural forces that exist within the gun culture and political culture within the United States. They also realize the high level of social creativity – the "Active production of society" (King 2006, p. 873) such as "visioning new futures, planning and implementing processes of social change, and developing new knowledge and ways of being" (King, 2006, p.873) that are central to fostering that change. A large part of that structural and cultural shift

seems away from individualized, atomized, and segregated solutions towards a more supportive and integrated way of viewing society. These protesters were practicing and exhibiting the preferred behaviors that foster change and it began by acknowledging the awful damage inflicted by the violence perpetrated by guns and fostering healing through genuine connection, support, and healing.

RQ 5: How did protesters react to perceptions of people outside of the movement?

Emergent themes: Toxic masculinity**,** high levels of tolerance for opposing viewpoints, reconciling personality and position based on feedback.

Culturist or Social Constructivist Perspective

Given the peaceful and supportive nature of these protest activities of this movement when interviewees reported their low levels of engaging and confronting counter protesters. Many interviewees reported building better knowledge and understanding of gun ownership laws, 2nd Amendment court cases, and along with developing a broader and more nuanced perspective of gun owners in their community and country. Interviewees were invested in being respectful of other viewpoints while focusing on the more immediate issue of supporting other like-minded individuals. Interviewees reported instances where they were confronted, either in person or online over their activities and points of view. Despite the high tolerance of opposing viewpoints on this issue and trying to reconcile their personality and position based on feedback from others, interviewees reported frequent confrontations with counter protesters who exhibited high levels of what they termed 'toxic masculinity'. This combination of dangerous, aggressive, and confrontational masculinity that intertwines with patriarchy, race, and class that produces power structures in society were referenced as a frequent source of identity demarcation, even among male interviewees. These identity markers are connected to questions of legitimacy as

they relate to gender (T. Billard, 2016), localism, age, and language (T. N. Ruhlig, 2017), and emotionality (H. Johnston, 2019). These socially constructed markers provide the key fault lines and areas of opportunity for conflict researchers going forward.

Frame Theory

Jenkins and Lopez (2018, p. 125) distill the key framework of the MFOL movement and participatory protest movements everywhere into "Investigation, dialogue and feedback, circulation, production, and mobilization". This framing provided protesters with a 'mission statement' for how to operate, even when confronted with toxic and threatening rhetoric. This participatory perspective helped to provide the nonviolent motivation necessary but also gave protesters a clear way to interact, or not, with counter protesters and people outside of the movement. Since participation was the guiding principle, it became a system of currency and provided access to the movement for all. If one was not there to provide support and healing, or offer substantive evidence supporting your position, or if one was not there to engage in dialogue and feedback, then it was easier to steer clear of that person and engage with people who want to reciprocate those framework principles. The advantage to this approach is that it clearly frames the issue and goal for the protester and helps them to maintain a sense of focus when engaging – or not - with counter protesters.

Structural and Cultural Violence

"As Galtung says, peace research – research aimed at understanding, preventing, and reducing violence is an effort to promote the realization of values" (Vorobej, 2008, p. 85) . So, it is with the MFOL movement and their behavior towards opposition messages and aggressive confrontations. This realization and practice of values such as investigation, dialogue and feedback, circulation, production, and mobilization provided the underpinnings of this

nonviolent and youth driven movement. This egalitarian system of distribution utilized by the

MFOL protesters was a direct, if unwitting, response to Galtung's inegalitarian mechanisms of

structural violence including a linear ranking order, cyclical interaction pattern, correlation

between rank and centrality, congruence between the systems, concordance between the ranks,

and high rank coupling between levels (Onuf, 2017). Protesters were striving to create new

structures and ways of being while trying to counteract a culture they saw as toxic, aggressively

masculine, and in need of repair. The following section will address the four gaps identified

because of the literature review.

Gaps identified in the literature review

Four gaps emerged as a result of conducting the literature review. I discuss how this

study addressed those gaps and contributed to the literature and furthered the conversation about

nonviolent social movements such as MFOL. First, many of these studies conducted data

gathering by using secondary sources such as news accounts, legal documents, or media analysis.

By employing a qualitative, narrative analysis to interviews directly with protesters who

participated in MFOL in the spring of 2018, this study utilized the stories of protesters to explore

self-perception, identity, relationships they built, and how they fit into the larger scheme of a

movement designed to address deeply embedded structural and cultural violence. These accounts

carried high levels of validity and reliability and clearly laid out how these individuals formed a

socially constructed reality. The axiological position of the narrative analysis allowed for a new

territory to be explored in one of the most vexing social problems of our times.

Second, often, the intended audiences for the vast majority of research in the literature

were journalists, editors, managers, or other journalism professors. My intended audience was

organizers, protesters, and practitioners within the peace movement. Given the variety in this

study, from disinterested protesters to highly engaged organizers, this ground level analysis to the movement addresses the gap squarely. In addition, because of this approach to the topic, the voices of young people, who already risk being marginalized due to their age, were brought to the front for perspective, analysis, and inspiration.

Third, in the vast majority of these studies, frames were focused on perceptions more than identity. While perceptions of journalists, editors, or the general public is important, my study was hoping to find the identities formed along with the connections made between protesters in a particular movement. By interviewing and analyzing identities, relationships, and dynamics between protesters, this study was able to shed light on how effective the model of investigation, dialogue and feedback, circulation, production, and mobilization worked for the MFOL movement in fostering change. More important, this study provides an important sense of perspective and likelihood for future engagement on gun violence in the United States.

Fourth, research and studies on MFOL were negligible. This may be due to the newness of the movement and the media saturation coverage while the protests were happening. While movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, Arab Spring Protests and protests in Hong Kong received coverage in the literature, MFOL or #Neveragain were at a minimum. This study contributes to the conversation about social movements, protester identity, and structural and cultural violence especially relevant as the United States emerges from the corona virus pandemic in 2021 and poised to return to schools, theaters, churches, and concert halls. The return to a pre-covid way of life means more opportunity for gun violence to rebound and the opportunity to address the issue will return. The following section will cover limitations of this study along with some recommendations for further research and a conclusion.

Limitations and Recommendations

Two limitations of this study that might be addressed include the size of the population interviewed, taking a longitudinal approach to interviewing, and the protesters interviewed. Given the qualitative, narrative analysis methodology employed and data generated, a larger population interviewed by multiple interviewers would add more contextual data that may further expand our understanding of the relational and identity dynamics in a volatile social setting. These interviews were conducted with protesters nearly three years after they engaged with MFOL. Often, participants were still in college and still in formative years. Conducting follow-up interviews once protesters enter early adulthood and beyond would provide insight as to whether or not they could commit to the movement in the long term. Especially interesting perspectives would emerge if these participants were interviewed once they became parents and faced the challenge of gun violence in that setting. Finally, a limitation of this study was the protester interviewed. Gathering data across social movements by interviewing Black Lives Matter protesters or March for Women's Lives protesters would provide valuable perspectives as it relates to identity, relationships, movements and motivation. In addition, interviewing counter protesters and gun rights activists would add important perspective to the findings here.

Recommendations

Since 2011, the United States has seen a variety of protest activity on some of the most contested issues of the times. From the initial protests of Black Lives Matter bookending both decades to a mass woman's march after the election of Donald Trump in 2016 to riotous insurrections in the Washington D. C. in 2021 following a hotly contested election. As far as hotly contested culture war issues go, gun ownership and gun violence are at or near the top of the list. However, one is struck by the peaceful nature of the MFOL protests in 2018. This

researcher attributes the highly successful peaceful and influential protests in part to the youthful genuineness and optimism MFOL protesters brought in response to mass shootings in school. This framing brought an energy and enthusiasm that resonated with not only protesters but also the public in general. The movement experienced some measure of success. In 2018, twenty-six states passed fifty-five laws favoring greater gun control (Jenkins and Lopez, 2018). The larger framing narrative that worked for this movement can be found in the guiding principles of the movement that included: Investigation, dialogue and feedback, circulation, production, and mobilization. This new narrative reflects the new rhetoric put forward by Hart (2012) and includes these four principles:

1. This is a new era;

2. This era is distinct from other eras;

3. This era demands new strategies;

4. This era is better than past eras.

One can see the linkages between the guiding principles of the movement with the new rhetoric offered here. This rhetorical stance was also present in the interviews conducted for the study. MFOL protesters do not consider themselves smarter or better than the adults of the era. They simply recognize the newness of the times and expect policies to reflect this new orientation, not a twentieth century idea of liberty or safety and security. Similar to the axiological orientation this study assumed in how it analyzed narrative data, K. V. Korostelina (2012, p. 255) provides the concept of collective axiology. This "System of value commitments that offers moral guidance to maintain relations with those within, and outside a group. It creates a sense of life and world, provides criteria for understanding actions and events, and regulates in-group

behavior". The orientation and framing the movement utilizes matters and provides much needed focus, cohesion, and a sense of purpose necessary for sustained and collective action.

The second recommendation extends the guiding principles of the movement, specifically dialogue and feedback. This practice can become a formal process delivered by members of the movement as they look to engage people in their community in favor of protecting gun rights and work toward solutions. The dialogue process as laid out by Saunders (1999) provides a framework that builds on an already established principle. As defined by Saunders (p. 81), dialogue,

> "Focuses on the dynamics of the underlying relationship that cause divisive problems, not just on the problems. Second, it focuses on changing those relationships, not just on choosing a policy direction or on dividing material goods or power in dispute through formal mediation or negotiation".

Employing this process as part of a strategy to engage people in the community is a necessary next step in reforming not only gun laws but transforming a culture dominated by guns and gun violence. The five-stage model offered by Saunders provides the framework needed to move the conversation forward within communities looking for a way forward. Steps include:

1. Engaging;

2. Mapping and naming problems and relationships;

3. Probing problems and relationships to choose a direction;

4. Scenario-building – Experiencing a changing relationship;

5. Acting together to make change happen.

Given the daunting task at hand and the communication orientation the MFOL employed, this step towards engaging others in dialogue makes sense and could help heal and support communities struggling with violence.

Conclusion

As studied here, the March For Our Lives movement presents us with a multitude of possibilities for a direction forward on gun control and violence within the United States. From a conflict transformation perspective, there is clear evidence that protesters with a clear mission statement and guiding principles can confront a controversial and contested social issue and impact some legislative change. The next step might be to extend out into local communities and engage others in dialogue and explore possibilities for change. From a social constructivist or culturist perspective, this study illustrated how malleable and creative young people exploring a new and unknown field can be. This malleability and creativity are especially impressive, given the social issue many were attempting to grapple with for the first time. From a frame theory perspective, this study showed the linkages between frames, identity, and movements and the alignment of political relevance with ideology and morality. Finally, from a structural and cultural violence perspective, this study revealed the possibilities for action and transformation within American society. The unknown variable of whether this movement can or should sustain itself in the long term will be determined sooner rather than later. Theorists and practitioners of conflict should consider the possibilities at hand and extend communities of research and communities of practice.

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