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Predictors of College Student Support toward Colin Kaepernick's National Anthem Protests

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Predictors of College Student Support toward Colin Kaepernick's National Anthem Protests

Cover Page Footnote

We would like to give a special thank you to our amazing 408 team and Dr. Dayna Henry for her guidance and support throughout the process. We would also like to thank Steve Grande and the VA Engage Journal for the presentation of our work and commitment to knowledge promotion.

Racial inequality is present at the foundational bedrock of the United States; instilled at the country's inception, inequalities have been enveloped in the laws that govern us, indoctrinated and justified through our school systems, and perpetuated by racist and passive leaders. While the rights to freedom of speech and peaceful protest remain strong in America, these liberties have almost solely been upheld for White Americans; this fact became glaringly obvious when the country experienced and witnessed the differing police responses towards Black protesters at Black Lives Matter [BLM] protests and White protesters at the Capitol Insurrection (Booker, 2021). This research delves into college students' perceptions in an effort to further understand the reasoning underpinning one's support of a person's right to protest, specifically to discover what prompts acceptance of the national anthem protests as demonstrated by Colin Kaepernick beginning in 2016 (Wyche, 2016).

Racial discrimination, as detailed, operates both silently and blatantly throughout the U.S. population and government. This study, developed in 2018, was initially created to investigate the social determinants of health underlying racist beliefs and behaviors; we sought to identify latent discriminatory and prejudicial opinions in an effort to explore why and where these views originate. The United States had recently elected Donald Trump as the President, a man infamous for his racist, sexist, and homophobic rhetoric (Gass, 2015; The Human Rights Campaign [HRC], n.d.). We were specifically interested in his impact upon the views of particular populations throughout the country.

As time has passed, the country has experienced life-changing and catastrophic events, each spotlighting the tremendous compound inequalities people of color suffer in America. We have seen the BLM movement explode following the horrific murder of George Floyd. We have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in lockdowns, millions upon millions of lives

lost, and politicians actively promoting false narratives regarding the virus. We have witnessed our nation's Capitol Building overtaken by violent terrorists whom the President encouraged with hostile and misinformed hyperbole. Many were stunned when the right to an abortion in every state was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Dobbs v. Jackson*. Were the study to be conducted now, we would examine the effect all of the aforementioned events have had upon people's opinions of social justice events. At the time of the study, no research had been completed regarding college students' perceptions of Colin Kaepernick's protests; we sought to examine the role personal characteristics such as race, gender¹, political ideology, socio-economic status [SES], NFL interest, and patriotic principles play in contributing to protest perceptions. After identification of our findings and the events that have occurred, we wonder how these views have changed? Have they become more or less pronounced within the identified groups? Which specific events have had the greatest impacts on opinions of social justice issues?

Understanding the interactions between social justice issues and individual, community, and population health is critical to creating a more equal and healthy country. Discrimination acts as a major social determinant of health, eliciting adverse stress-related responses, exacerbating the risk of deleterious health impacts such as cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure, and increasing the likelihood of experiencing violence (Davis, 2020). We need to recognize where and how discriminatory beliefs originate in order to disrupt their propagation throughout our country and eliminate health inequities. This study has provided a foundational association between certain characteristics and support for racial justice movements; this initial determination was previously unidentified.

¹ At various points in the study, the authors unintentionally did not adequately distinguish between the term "gender" and its related components and sex assigned at birth. The researchers want to acknowledge the term's misuse and reiterate the importance of understanding the differences between gender identity and biological sex.

Background

American culture has a rich history when it comes to political protests and civic action being utilized to convey meaningful messages. The Boston Tea Party, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and the suffrage movement are all common historical examples where a significant change occurred by way of protest (Carbone, 2011; Wang & Soule, 2012). More recently, we have seen the Women's Marches of 2017 and 2018, the climate strike in 2019, and the Black Lives Matter movement (Sweet, 2022). At the development of this article in December of 2018, the National Football League's (NFL) national anthem protests had not only been controversial but also well-discussed throughout media and communities alike.

The NFL national anthem protests began when Colin Kaepernick, the quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, remained seated during the national anthem in a preseason game in August 2016 (Wyche, 2016). In an exclusive interview following the game, Kaepernick told NFL Media that he was "not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color." Kaepernick continued to say, "To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder." Kaepernick's protests did not gain national attention until his teammates began to sit and kneel on the sidelines with him. Soon, NFL players across the league began to kneel, with college and high school sports teams following suit (Wyche, 2016).

The NFL had about 25.4 million viewers during the 2016 season, ensuring the protests would be visible and declarative (Stanhope, 2018). This number did not include the views garnered through social media platforms. In September of 2018, Nike released a controversial advertisement featuring Kaepernick with the quote, "Believe in something. Even if it means

sacrificing everything” (Thomas, 2018). Nike is a large corporation with an even larger platform, snowballing the protest’s reach throughout America. Data collection was conducted in 2018 after the release of the advertisement, marking pronounced perceptions and unique results when compared with similar studies. Moreover, at that time, very little formal and current research about American perceptions toward the protests had been performed.

According to a survey conducted in 2015, 63% of Americans supported protesting the government when it acts unjustly; when the topic changed to something as controversial as the national anthem protests, however, support decreased drastically (Cox & Jones, 2015). Similarly, the President at the time of research, Donald Trump, voiced his opposition towards the anthem protests, and nearly half of all Americans believed the protests were disrespectful and disruptive (Intravia et al., 2018; Marist Poll, 2017). Additionally, a person who felt that political activism engagement would benefit them was more likely to participate than one who felt they would not be benefitted (Badaan et al., 2018). Innumerable factors influence an individual's perception about social justice movements such as the national anthem protests; the factors explored in this study are: race, gender, political ideology, socio-economic status, interest in the NFL, and patriotism.

Race/Ethnicity

Although little formal research has been completed, studies have identified that Black people were more likely than their White counterparts to perceive the different forms of NFL protests, such as kneeling, sitting, and fist-raising, as acceptable; they were also less likely to support punishment by the NFL for player participation in protesting (Intravia et al., 2018). Approximately 75% of African American respondents and 50% of Latino/a respondents supported not standing for the anthem in contrast to more than 50% of White participants that

believed players should remain standing (Marist Poll, 2017). The majority of Black and Latino/a voters reported that players have a right to protest while less than half of White voters supported this idea (Quinnipiac University, 2018). Additionally, almost 60% of White participants said protesting makes our country better, but when asked about Black Americans protesting, that number dropped to just 48% (Cox & Jones, 2015). Approximately 56% of Americans of color said protesting an unjust government makes America better, but that number increased to 65% when asked specifically about Black Americans protesting (Cox & Jones, 2015).

Gender

Research has indicated that men were more critical and disapproving of Kaepernick's protests than women (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). A national poll found that more women than men opposed the rule mandating players stand on the field during the anthem; women also opposed fining teams with players who chose not to stand (Quinnipiac University, 2018). Additionally, when asked about their approval regarding Donald Trump's management of race relations, women were 21% more disapproving than men (Quinnipiac University, 2018).

Political Ideology

Political party may help shape many decisions and beliefs. The majority of Republicans believed NFL players did not have the right to protest while on the field, while most Democrats supported players' right to protest during the anthem (Haring, 2018; Quinnipiac University, 2018). Democrats also believed the protests were intended to highlight perceived injustices and bring attention to needed change, not disrespect the flag (De Pinto et al., 2018). Inversely, Republicans tended to oppose the national anthem protests, believing it was both disrespectful to the flag and disruptive; this belief reinforced their view that players should protest on their own time (De Pinto et al., 2018).

Socio-economic Status

Studies identified that people of lower socio-economic statuses may be more likely to support national anthem protests and other social movements than those of higher socio-economic statuses. Americans identifying with racial minorities disproportionately experience lower socio-economic statuses; this can be characterized by living in areas with increased levels of poverty, diminished health and access to health care, and decreased levels of schooling (American Psychological Association [APA]; 2017). For these reasons, those with lower socio-economic statuses may connect more with social movements, especially those related to inadequate treatment, discriminatory behavior, and harms to mental and physical health (APA, 2017). Socio-economic status is an interactive and comprehensive characteristic defined by educational level, income stability, and subjective norms, leading to an abundance of research examining its relationship with protests (Badawi, 2018; Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Manstead, 2018).

NFL Interest

The controversy surrounding the protests affected opinions of those interested in the NFL. One study identified a decrease in active following of the league from 58% in 2014 to 52% in 2018 (Beaton, 2018). Nearly 25% of the newly inactive followers stated their disinterest was due to politically driven protests; the majority recognized the national anthem protests as their specific motivation (Kilgore & Clement, 2017). Opponents exhibited their disapproval when as many as 177,000 individuals signed a petition entitled “#NoKaepernickNoNFL”; Kaepernick’s exclusion from the NFL followed, but a direct association was not identified (Washington, 2017).

Patriotism

The levels of perceived patriotism paint a distinct divide, especially considering they are variably regarded as patriotic or unpatriotic. About 57% of voters felt the protests were unpatriotic (Bedard, 2018). Their rationale generally declared that the flag is representative of American ideals, such as military personnel fighting for American freedom and pride in the country; they believed that the players were dishonoring these principles by protesting during the anthem (Smith, 2018). Conversely, assertions that the protests were patriotic maintain that players were exercising their First Amendment right to highlight injustices faced by the oppressed (Cox, 2018; Voisine, 2016). Previous formal research defining patriotism and its relationship to protesting has been inadequate and insufficient.

Objective

The emergence of formal political protesting can be traced back to the 18th century; regardless, the protest led by Colin Kaepernick continues to be controversial to Americans today. Kaepernick's resolute decision in August of 2016 led this country into an era of inquiry. Anthem protests have been coordinated following Kaepernick's, leading us to question the characteristic nature of the audience finding these protests acceptable. Previous research determined people of color, women, a lower socio-economic status, and Democrats were more likely to support national anthem protests. Conversely, higher levels of patriotism, defined as devotion and responsibility to one's country, may decrease likelihood of support (Baumeister, n.d.). Our study sought to determine whether these trends continue within the college student population, as well as to further define characteristic relationships with national anthem protest support. Findings can be applied to social activism, policy change, future research, public health officials focused on community engagement, and community members themselves.

The prospective questions this study sought to answer are:

1. How do race/ethnicity, gender, political ideology, socio-economic status, NFL interest, and patriotism of college students affect their attitudes towards the national anthem protests by Colin Kaepernick?
2. What are students' general perceptions toward various forms of protest, and how is this associated with Colin Kaepernick's protest?

Methodology

Participants

The study surveyed 408 James Madison University [JMU] students. All demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1. Gender distribution in the study was quite representative to that of the University's; the participants in the study were 65.4% female and 33.1% male, while JMU in 2018 was made up of 59% female and 41% male students (Office of Institutional Research, 2019). The age distribution ranged from 18 to 39 years with the average participant being about 20 years old ($M=20.08$, $SD=1.61$). Participants identified as: White (55.1%), Black (20.3%), Latino/a (10.3%), Multiracial (8.3%), or Other (5.8%); the sampling was more racially diverse than the JMU population in 2018, which was 74.9% White, 6.5% Latino/a, and 4.8% Black (Office of Institutional Research, 2019). More than half of the participants reported no weekly consumption of NFL content, producing a mode of 0 hours and a positively skewed mean ($M=1.75$, $SD=3.14$); the mode remained 0 for both men and women. Participants identified most as having Liberal political views (47.3%) followed by Moderate (39.2%) and Conservative (11.6%). Additionally, the majority of participants fell into the middle socio-economic category (52.3%) followed by the lower (34.7%) and upper socio-economic categories (13.0%). Survey

administration and completion was done in person, achieving a response rate of approximately 97%.

Procedures

Approval from the Institutional Review Board [IRB] was received (IRB protocol #19-0190). Surveys were then administered using a convenience sample; our team was made up of five researchers, and each researcher collected approximately 75 surveys. The surveys were distributed to and completed by voluntary participants in a variety of locations on the JMU campus, including: campus libraries, academic classrooms and buildings, sorority and fraternity meetings, and centers for academic achievement. Upon confirmation that the individual was a student at JMU over the age of 18, they were provided a cover letter informing them of the possible risks and benefits resulting from survey completion. In turn, participants were provided a paper-and-pencil survey to be completed anonymously. The collected data was inputted and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS].

Measures

Participants were given a six-page survey and asked to indicate their race, gender, political ideology, socio-economic status, interest in the NFL, patriotism, and feelings towards both general protest activities and Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protests. In addition to the specific questions and scales discussed below, supplementary questions were asked throughout the survey; we determined these questions were extraneous to the predetermined variables, and they were omitted for subsequent analyses. The full survey can be accessed in Appendix A.

First, participants were instructed to select the race/ethnicity with which they most closely identified; they did this by checking a box next to their chosen option. Possible options were: "White/Caucasian," "Hispanic/Latino/a," "Black/African American," "Asian," "American

Indian and Alaska Native,” “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander,” and “Other.” If the participant did not identify with any of the listed options, they were able to specify their race by checking the “Other” option and writing in their identifier. Response rates for “Asian,” “American Indian and Alaska Native,” “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander,” and “Other” were low; these options were collapsed into the “Other” category for analysis.

Respondents were then asked to mark on a scale the socio-economic level with which they associated. Options ranged from “Lower” on the left end of the scale, to “Middle” in the center, and “Upper” on the right end of the scale. Participants had the option to mark between different socio-economic categories on the scale, indicating they fell somewhere in between options. Because quantitative metrics were not collected for the socio-economic variable, researchers chose to classify markings lying between the choices as one of the three aforementioned categories. This was done for ease of analysis.

Participants wrote in the gender with which they most closely identified. Overall, only 6 participants identified as a gender other than male (N=135) or female (N=267). Because of the low response rate for additional genders, only male and female categories were applied for analysis.

Respondents were then asked how many hours per week they consumed NFL content. This was used as a continuous variable to gauge interest in the NFL.

Additionally, participants indicated their political ideology by marking on a scale nearest to the ideals with which they identified. These options ranged from “Liberal” on the left end of the scale, to “Moderate” in the center, and “Conservative” on the right end of the scale. Similar to the scale for socio-economic status, they had the option to mark between different ideologies, indicating they moderately leaned one way or the other. Markings lying between the variables

were collapsed into two options for ease of analysis; “Liberal” and “Moderately Liberal” collapsed into “Liberal,” and “Conservative” and “Moderately Conservative” collapsed into “Conservative.” The variable “Moderate” was analyzed as is.

Self-perceived patriotism was assessed using a Likert-type scale, created by researchers. Eight different statements containing American ideals were presented; these inquired about personal beliefs and behaviors towards the nation’s symbols, such as the American flag and the national anthem. Responses to these statements were then used to compute the Patriotism Scale. Participants could identify their frequency of engagement in activities and level of beliefs with the following responses: “Never” (1), “Rarely” (2), “Sometimes” (3), “Often” (4), and “Always” (5). The minimum score for this scale was an 8, while the maximum was a 40. A higher score indicated the participant was more likely to find patriotic acts acceptable. Researchers ultimately agreed to remove two statements regarding voting: participation in the 2016 presidential election and participation in the 2018 midterm election. These statements were disregarded because a large portion of the sampled population were not legally allowed to vote during these elections; for this reason, specific voting statements regarding registration and intention were included to assess patriotism. The scale included statements such as: “I put my hand over my heart for the National Anthem” and “I am proud to be an American.”

Respondents were then given a set of twenty statements which were adapted from previous studies; they were told to communicate their opposition or support for each using a Likert-type scale (Intravia et al., 2018). These responses provided information on personal acceptance of Colin Kaepernick’s protests and were used to compute the National Anthem Protest Scale (NAPS). Participants could respond with the following options: “Strongly Oppose” (1), “Somewhat Oppose” (2), “Neutral” (3), “Somewhat Favor” (4), and “Strongly Favor” (5).

The scale score ranged from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 100; a higher number indicated the participant was more accepting of the national anthem protests. Several items were reverse-coded prior to analysis. The scale included statements such as: “The NFL requiring players to stand for the anthem” and “Athletes protesting during professional sports.”

Finally, participants were asked to indicate their acceptability toward thirteen different forms of protest by ranking items on a Likert-type scale. These responses were used to compute the Protest Acceptability Scale (PAS). Response options included: “Strongly Oppose” (1), “Somewhat Oppose” (2), “Neutral” (3), “Somewhat Favor” (4), and “Strongly Favor” (5). The scale had a minimum score of 13 and a maximum score of 65. A higher score indicated that the participant showed higher acceptability of various forms of protest. No items were re-coded or discarded from this scale. Examples of protest activities included: candle-lighting, marching, and looting.

Analysis

SPSS was utilized to manage and analyze collected data. Frequencies were run for the categorical variables: race/ethnicity, gender, political ideology, and SES. Tables 2, 3, and 4 include examples of categorical data transformed into continuous data, each used to compute the Patriotism Scale, PAS, and NAPS, respectively. Descriptive statistics were then run for the continuous variables: NFL interest, patriotism, PAS, and NAPS. Means for continuous variables are provided in Table 5 for comparison.

An Independent Samples T-Test was run to examine and compare mean scores for patriotism, PAS, and NAPS among genders. A One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run on race, political ideology, and socio-economic status to determine statistical significance between variable categories as well as their relationships with NAPS. Post hoc comparisons

using the Tukey HSD Test were run comparing differences in NAPS scores for categories within race/ethnicity and political ideology. A Pearson's Correlation was run for NFL interest, patriotism, PAS, and NAPS; this was used to examine their relationships with one another.

Results

There was a significant effect of race/ethnicity on the National Anthem Protest Scale (NAPS) at the $p < 0.05$ level for the five race categories ($F(4, 383) = 22.23$). Mean scores for NAPS were significantly different across several races/ethnicities. As seen in Table 6, Black participants scored highest on NAPS, followed by Multiracial, Latino/a, Other, and White; respectively, NAPS mean scores were 87.40, 78.69, 77.60, 71.58, and 69.29. Racial groups that had significant differences in mean NAPS scores were: White and Black ($p < 0.001$), White and Latino/a ($p = 0.013$), White and Multiracial ($p = 0.010$), Black and Latino/a ($p = 0.008$), Black and Multiracial ($p = 0.047$), and Black and Other ($p < 0.001$).

Differences in mean patriotism scores between genders were not statistically significant (Female: $M = 31.19$, Male: $M = 30.69$; $p = 0.557$). There was a statistically significant difference identified in mean scores for men and women on the Protest Acceptability Scale (Female: $M = 47.05$, Male: $M = 44.91$; $p = 0.019$). Additionally, Table 7 demonstrates there was no statistically significant difference in means of NAPS scores between genders (Female: $M = 74.56$, Male: $M = 74.65$; $p = 0.958$).

A significant effect of political ideology on attitudes towards Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protests at the $p < 0.05$ level was found for the three categories of Liberal, Moderate, and Conservative ($F(2, 383) = 7.86$). As shown in Table 7, Liberals, on average, scored highest on NAPS, followed by Moderates and Conservatives (means of 83.65, 70.72, and 50.14, respectively). Group mean scores for NAPS were significantly different between all three

categories: Liberal and Moderate ($p\text{-value}<0.001$), Liberal and Conservative ($p\text{-value}<0.001$), and Moderate and Conservative ($p\text{-value}<0.001$).

There was a significant effect of socio-economic status on NAPS at the $p<0.05$ level for the three classes ($F(2, 383)=7.86$). Participants of a lower SES scored highest on NAPS, followed by middle and upper (means of 81.00, 75.70, and 70.83, respectively). Seen in Table 7, statistically significant differences were found between lower and upper SES ($p=0.001$) and between middle and upper SES ($p=0.021$).

Average NFL content consumption ranged greatly from 0-36 hours; the majority of participants consumed no weekly NFL content, producing a mode of 0 hours. A weak negative correlation was found between NFL interest and NAPS ($r(379)=-0.097$); the relationship was statistically insignificant but approached significance ($p=0.060$). NFL interest had a weak negative correlation with PAS ($r(381)=-0.099$) that was not statistically significant but approached significance ($p=0.054$). Additionally, NFL interest had a weak positive correlation with patriotism that was statistically significant ($r(394)=0.159$, $p=0.002$). Table 8 presents an Intercorrelation Matrix providing the direction and magnitude as well as statistical significance for interaction between continuous variables (NFL content, patriotism, PAS, and NAPS).

The majority of participants identified as patriotic ($M=30.87$); patriotism scores ranged from 9 to 40. Most respondents answered “Often” or “Always” to all items presented on the scale, as detailed in Table 2. Additionally, the scale had excellent internal validity (Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.935$). There was a statistically significant relationship found between patriotism and NAPS ($p<0.001$), with evidence of a strong negative correlation identified ($r(379)=-0.692$). Patriotism also had a moderate negative relationship with PAS ($r(383)=-0.475$) that was statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

The average PAS score for participants was high ($M=46.48$), ranging from 19 to 65. Table 3 presents protest demonstrations for which participants ranked their acceptability. The majority of participants found the following activities favorable: candle-lighting ($M=4.29$), petitioning ($M=4.46$), holding signs/picketing ($M=4.22$), marching ($M=4.43$), press conferences ($M=4.44$), sit-ins ($M=4.21$), and letter writing campaigns ($M=4.41$). Protest activities opposed by most respondents included: looting ($M=1.68$) and blocking a business' entrance ($M=2.33$). This scale exhibited a good level of internal validity (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.878$). Additionally, a statistically significant relationship was identified between PAS and NAPS ($p<0.001$), and evidence of a strong positive correlation was found ($r(370)=0.620$).

Finally, the average score for NAPS was high ($M=74.80$), ranging from 30 to 100; several scale statements are presented in Table 4. The majority of respondents supported Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protests ($M=3.91$). Most believed that "Americans speaking up against unfair treatment by the government makes our country better" ($M=4.46$) and approved of the Black Lives Matter Movement ($M=4.39$). The scale also displayed excellent internal validity (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.954$).

Discussion

As stated, the purpose of this study was to assess how college students' race, gender, political ideology, SES, NFL interest, patriotism, and acceptance of general forms of protest correlated with support for national anthem protests. Race was statistically significant in predicting anthem protest support. Kaepernick made his motive for protesting clear: the unfair treatment and oppression of people of color in the U.S. needs to stop. Of the races studied, Black participants had the highest percentages of protest support whereas White participants had the lowest, aligning with the study hypothesis and previous research.

While our results were not surprising, they were enlightening. Because this study was completed in a college setting, we believe support rates were likely much higher than in the general population. Additionally, findings were directly in tune with the racial breakdown of voters for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election; his voting base majorly consisted of White voters (54%) followed by Latino/a voters (28%) and Black voters (6%) (Pew Research Center, 2018). We believe that increased support for Trump and the ultimate disapproval of social justice movements may go hand-in-hand, especially when considering the inflammatory and condemnatory language he used against Colin Kaepernick and his supporters.

With the passage of time, specifically as it relates to the BLM protests, the pandemic's disproportionate impact on people of color, and an increase in hate group activity such as the Proud Boys, we believe that opinions regarding social justice movements such as Colin Kaepernick's would be more pronounced in all groups. This means that gaps in average differences found in NAPS scores – Latino/a participants scored around 10 points higher than White participants and Black participants scored around 10 points higher than Latino/a participants – would become larger, establishing a wider divide in beliefs.

The study found statistically insignificant correlations between gender and both patriotism and NAPS; this suggests there were no meaningful differences between the level of patriotism and attitudes of Kaepernick's protests for males and females. Additionally, a significant association was identified between gender and support for general forms of protest, confirming our hypothesis and verifying correlations identified in previous studies.

The relationship between gender and NAPS was initially surprising to us but may not withstand the progression of time. As the years have passed, women have been increasingly subject to unfavorable circumstances: becoming the main caregivers and teachers for their

children during lockdown, making up almost 80% of the healthcare workforce during the pandemic, and losing elemental rights to make decisions on their bodies (Ranji et al., 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Women have consistently been negatively impacted and unprotected; for these reasons, we believe if the study were to be completed now, women would present with a statistically significant association with support for social justice issues like the national anthem protests. It is also why they already presented with significant support for general forms of protest.

Merriam-Webster (n.d.-b) defines a liberal as “a person who believes that government should be active in supporting social and political change.” Moderate, on the other hand, is defined as someone “professing or characterized by political or social beliefs that are not extreme” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). Additionally, conservative is defined as an individual “disposed to preserve existing conditions, institutions, etc., or to restore traditional ones, and to limit change” (Dictionary.com, 2022). Our study found that participants identifying as Liberal scored highest on NAPS, while Conservatives were least likely to support Kaepernick’s protest. The statistical differences in means between political ideology categories demonstrate the divisive and contrasting principles in the United States. These relationships have been exhibited in prior research, with findings recognizing Liberals as more likely to organize and support social movements, public demonstrations, and institutional change (Quinnipiac University, 2018; Reinhart, 2018).

Similar to our discussion on race/ethnicity, these relationships were predictable and expected. From June of 2020 to November of 2021, there was a sharp decrease in Republican support of peaceful protest from just above 50% to just below 25% (Tesler, 2021). This drop in approval followed swiftly on the heels of events including the BLM protests after George

Floyd's murder and laws prohibiting the teaching of critical race theory (Tesler, 2021).

Following these events and countless others, we would expect these views to continue becoming more pronounced. We also expect, however, that beliefs would change wholly depending on the protest in question. For example, while Republicans may largely oppose social justice protests, movements sponsored by white supremacists like the Oath Keepers or conspiratorial groups like QAnon may be more likely to be supported. This is especially expected because of the open and implicit approval Donald Trump has shown these groups over the years.

Results on political ideology have useful application for policy development and change. These findings will allow for conscientious policy innovations and increased understanding of political differences. As political differences deepen, diplomatic cornerstones and perspectives are distinguished and exemplified. Recent years have shown Americans the importance of our democracy's sustainability. These distinctions emphasize the necessity for an increased comprehension of democracy and its components as well as appropriate strategies for its expansion and maintenance. An increased understanding of differing political views will support the generation of more considerate diplomatic conversations and practices for our country's enhancement.

The majority of participants in our study identified themselves as middle SES, and victims of social injustices often reside within lower socio-economic statuses (APA, 2017). Previous research found that White Americans with college degrees were more likely to believe that kneeling during the anthem was an acceptable form of protest; this group of people are more likely to reside within a higher SES due to increased social mobility from increased educational attainment. Because our study drew from a population in the process of attaining their college

degrees, we cannot verify whether or not White Americans with college degrees were more likely than our population to support kneeling during the anthem (Quinnipiac University, 2018).

Generations of systemic racism and oppression have given rise to a lower SES disproportionately represented by people of color and minorities (Letang et al., 2021). Minorities also face the greatest levels of multidimensional poverty, meaning they experience more hardships at one time (APA, 2017). As such, people identifying with lower SES have a stronger reason to support movements such as the national anthem protests. Additionally, the pandemic has had notable impacts upon the financial status of the American people, including job loss and the inability to pay rent (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022). The intersectionality in the overlap of social identities became especially deleterious during the pandemic, impacting Black Americans considerably. For these reasons, the findings demonstrating the relationship between lower SES and heightened support for the national anthem protests were expected.

Former research determined Americans with greater interest in the NFL were less willing to support national anthem protests, although our study identified no significant association (Haring, 2018). While inconsistent with previous findings, differing results may be due to an undersampling of people with an interest in sports; women consumed a weekly average of 0.99 hours of NFL content and men had an average of 3.26 hours. Both means were skewed right, meaning the vast majority of participants reported little to no hours of NFL consumption and very few reported higher amounts. Although we found the lack of correlation to be unexpected, we believe a greater inclusion of people interested in the NFL would reveal a significant relationship.

Similarly, NFL interest was not found to have a significant relationship with PAS, but a correlation with patriotism was determined. The relationship with PAS is expected to approach

statistical significance with a larger sample of individuals with greater levels of NFL consumption; we theorize that increased levels of NFL interest would be correlated with decreased levels of PAS.

The beliefs and application of nationalistic ideals were used to define patriotism: devotion to the flag, American pride, and other similar attitudes and activities. Findings revealed that participants with increased levels of patriotism maintained more negative attitudes towards Kaepernick's protests and other forms of protesting. Seen in previous research, participants with a greater sense of pride in the U.S. were less accepting of Kaepernick's national anthem protests and more supportive of punishment for participating players (Cox, 2018; Intravia et al., 2018; Smith, 2018).

While these findings may be in contrast to some views of patriotism, such as protection of and right to practice the First Amendment, the idolized and divisive redefining of patriotism in the last few years highlights our results. This new definition of patriotism has been encouraged by Donald Trump and those who identify as MAGA loyalists; white supremacist groups promote principles of hate under the guise of patriotism and nationalism. We would expect these distinctions to be especially pronounced were the study to be conducted now.

President Trump's rhetoric, platform, and supporters have created confusion around and a redefining of the word "patriot" (vanden Heuvel, 2017). As detailed, people vacillate in their determination of social justice movements as patriotic or unpatriotic. Consistently in the United States, however, this terminology has been defined by an admiration for our military, approval of war involvement and military decisions, and a deeply engrained faith in our country's importance and prowess (vanden Heuvel, 2017). Additionally, the concept of protesting has been considered uncharacteristic of a patriot's ideals. Donald Trump has actively weaponized and

reconceptualized patriotism, declaring early in his presidency that “a new national pride stirs in the American soul” (vanden Heuvel, 2017).

Our results indicated that increased levels of patriotism were correlated with increased levels of NFL consumption. In consideration of this finding and the previously defined changes to patriotism, it is unsurprising that NFL consumption would be negatively correlated with protest support, especially as Donald Trump has asserted his beliefs regarding patriotism in America.

The results allow for an increased understanding of patriotism in the college student population, as well as its evolution in social movements. These findings provide individuals with additional insights into how college students view the characteristics of patriotic acts as well as how we want to define patriotism moving forward. The assessment of both patriotism and political leaders' impacts are essential to enhance an understanding of how our threatened democracy can be preserved.

Our results identified a correlation between general protest acceptability and support for Kaepernick's protests. In the past decade, Americans have witnessed and taken part in some of the most instrumental protests in U.S. history; immediately prior to and soon after the completion of collecting data for this study, the Women's Marches 2017 and 2018, March for Our Lives, and George Floyd protests all occurred (Kerr, 2018). We speculate that the increase in nationwide protests has resulted in increased exposure and will ultimately lead to an increase in acceptance of protests. As public social stances have increasingly become a way for Americans to voice their concerns and call for change, we would definitely expect to see this relationship magnified.

Understanding accepted forms of protest activities is beneficial to social movement leaders. College students are a passionate, educated, and motivated populace; consideration of

approved activities will allow for focused initiatives and more meaningful messages to garner wider support, more impactful policies, and increased community change. The First Amendment right to freedom of speech is a pillar for our country's dynamism and successful operation; increased protection and understanding of this right for all Americans will help to ensure justice and equality are sustained.

Limitations

The overwhelming proportion of students on the JMU campus are White and female, with a reduced number of additional races and gender identities. While the overrepresentation of Black and Latino/a students may have provided a better understanding of these races, the underrepresentation of Multiracial and Other races may hinder the generalizability of findings. Participant recruitment through convenience sampling may have also led to a reduction in the study's external validity.

Additional consideration should be given to the unanalyzed data. A number of collected variables were disregarded or collapsed for analysis, including variables regarding voting, political ideology, or socio-economic status. This decision may have led to the oversimplification of results as well as gaps in information.

We also observed a reduced response rate on the final page of the survey; this page contained the Protest Acceptability Scale. The reduced rate may have resulted from participant fatigue due to both survey length and design.

In addition, race relations remain a sensitive and controversial topic in America; participants may have responded to survey inquiries in the way they believed they were expected to, leading to social desirability bias. Finally, the presence of unknown confounding variables

always remains a possibility. All detailed limitations may have had an impact on the study's results.

Suggestions for Future Research

Dialogue surrounding the national anthem protests is impassioned and persistent, unlocking the necessity for future research regarding this topic. One of our most significant findings revolves around patriotism's impacts and influences. As patriotism becomes a more pronounced and divisive topic, further exploration is recommended. Ties between patriotism, social activism, racism, and more have the potential to clarify the origins and evolution of core beliefs. Patriotism remains a strong current within our country; this is not inherently negative, as support and promotion of the nation can lead to a greater, more just republic. Appreciating patriotism's meaning, its value to the nation's sustainability and functionality, and how we would like to define it moving forward is crucial to the growth and preservation of our democracy. Recognizing the current strengths and weaknesses of our country is essential to improving deficiencies and finding harmony between differences.

Similarly, investigation into the true influence of political leaders' rhetoric and beliefs upon the country's populace may be enlightening in the work to better our country. These insights will aid in the development of education necessary to cultivate cultural understanding, acceptance, and justice promotion.

Conclusion

Our study revealed that race/ethnicity, political ideology, SES, patriotism, and overall acceptability of protests may predict college students' support of Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protests. Our study established correlations between support for national anthem protests and the following: identifying as a Black American, upholding Liberal ideologies, belonging to a

lower socio-economic status, and support for additional forms of protest. Additional associations were determined between patriotism and both NFL consumption and opposition of additional forms of protest. While all valuable determinants, the identification of patriotism's impacts may be the most consequential of all, especially as this characteristic becomes more distinct, divisive, and influential. Understanding its contributing factors, impacts, and evolution are essential to the meaningful adaptation and progression of our country.

Racial discrimination and inequality have existed since the formation of the United States and has been brought to the forefront with Colin Kaepernick's protests. Our findings will aid in the education of individuals, communities and social groups, public health practitioners, and policymakers. Increasing knowledge surrounding social justice is not only important to decrease discriminatory behaviors and beliefs, but pivotal to creating a more just, inclusive, and equitable society. The expanded interpretation of college student beliefs will help our population foster an acknowledgment and consideration of differing views in order to progress as a free and democratic country.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics (n=408)

	N	%
Gender		
Female	267	65.4
Male	135	33.1
Other	6	1.5
Age		
18	57	14.0
19	81	19.9
20	122	29.9
21	103	25.2
22 +	45	10.0
Race/Ethnicity		
White	225	55.1
Black	83	20.3
Latino/a	42	10.3
Multiracial	34	8.3
Other	24	5.8
NFL Content		
0 hours	220	53.9
1-3 hours	134	25.5
4-6 hours	50	12.2
More than 6 hours	26	6.2
Political Ideology		
Liberal	193	47.3
Moderate	160	39.2
Conservative	47	11.6
Socio-economic Status		
Lower	134	34.7
Middle	202	52.3
Upper	50	13.0

Table 2. Sample items presented in the Patriotism Scale (n=408)

	Never/Rarely %(N)	Sometimes %(N)	Often/Always %(N)
Stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.	7.9 (32)	11.5 (47)	80.4 (328)
Hand over heart for the National Anthem.	13.4 (55)	20.6 (84)	65.7 (268)
Proud to hear the Anthem.	20.6 (84)	23.5 (96)	55.5 (226)
Proud to be an American.	11.8 (48)	26.0 (106)	61.8 (252)
Proud seeing the U.S. flag.	19.8 (81)	25.0 (102)	54.6 (223)
U.S. flag is symbolic of our freedom of speech.	18.6 (76)	21.6 (88)	59.1 (241)
U.S. flag is symbolic of our military's sacrifice.	14.4 (59)	23.5 (96)	61.8 (252)
The Anthem is symbolic of our military's sacrifice.	18.9 (77)	22.5 (92)	58.3 (238)

Table 3. Items presented in Protest Acceptability Scale [PAS] (n=408)

	Oppose %(N)	Neutral %(N)	Support %(N)
Candle-lighting.	2.9 (12)	17.9 (73)	78.9 (322)
Fasting/hunger strike.	29.7 (121)	27.9 (114)	42.4 (173)
Petitioning.	2.2 (9)	10.3 (42)	87.3 (356)
Holding signs/picketing.	6.2 (25)	14.2 (58)	79.7 (325)
Marching.	4.1 (17)	8.6 (35)	86.8 (354)
Sloganeering/chanting.	15.0 (61)	18.9 (77)	65.0 (269)
Press conference.	1.4 (6)	11.0 (45)	87.0 (355)
Sit-ins.	5.6 (23)	17.2 (70)	76.5 (312)
Blocking a road.	57.6 (235)	19.9 (81)	22.5 (92)
Looting.	77.7 (317)	17.2 (70)	4.6 (19)
Meeting disruption.	58.8 (240)	21.3 (87)	17.9 (73)
Letting writing campaign.	2.7 (11)	11.3 (46)	85.1 (347)

Table 4. Sample categorical items used to compute National Anthem Protest Scale [NAPS]

	Oppose %(N)	Neutral %(N)	Support %(N)
Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protest.	16.6 (68)	19.4 (79)	63.9 (261)
Americans speaking up against unfair treatment by the government makes our country better.	3.9 (16)	10.5 (43)	85.5 (349)
The way Donald Trump handles race relations.	81.9 (334)	14.5 (59)	3.5 (14)
Black Lives Matter Movement.	5.9 (24)	13.2 (54)	79.9 (326)
Kneeling during the national anthem.	19.4 (79)	32.8 (134)	47.6 (194)

Table 5. Variable means for continuous variables

	M	SD	Range
NFL Content	1.75	3.14	0-36
Patriotism	30.87	8.09	9-40
Protest Acceptability Scale	46.48	8.57	18-65
National Anthem Protest Scale	74.80	16.64	30-100

Table 6. ANOVA comparisons of race/ethnicity and NAPS

	N	M	SD	Tukey HSD Comparisons				
				WH	BLK	H	MR	O
Race/Ethnicity								
White (WH)	212	69.29	17.87	---	<0.001*	0.013*	0.010*	0.955
Black (BLK)	80	87.40	6.92	---	---	0.008*	0.047*	<0.001*
Hispanic (H)	40	77.60	12.82	---	---	---	0.988	0.533
Multiracial (MR)	32	78.69	13.79	---	---	---	---	0.407
Other (O)	24	71.58	12.19	---	---	---	---	---

(*) indicates statistical significance at the level $p < 0.05$

Table 7. Comparisons of categorical variables and NAPS

	M	SD	P-value
Gender			
Female	74.56	16.82	p=0.958
Male	74.65	16.20	
Political Ideology			
Liberal	83.65	11.46	p<0.001*
Moderate	70.72	13.70	
Conservative	50.14	14.06	
Socio-economic Status			
Lower	81.00	10.98	p<0.001*
Middle	75.70	16.12	
Upper	70.83	18.18	

(*) indicates statistical significance at the level $p < 0.05$.

Table 8. Intercorrelation matrix presenting magnitude, direction, and statistical significance between continuous variables

	Patriotism	NFL Content	PAS	NAPS
Patriotism	—	0.159*	-0.475*	-0.692*
NFL Interest		—	-0.099	-0.097
PAS			—	0.620*
NAPS				—

PAS: Protest Acceptability Scale; NAPS: National Anthem Protest Scale.

Bold indicates Pearson's Correlation.

() indicates statistical significance at the level $p < 0.05$.*

Appendix A: Finalized Survey Instrument

By taking this survey, you are agreeing that you are a student at JMU over the age of 18.

Section A.

1. What is your ethnicity?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White/Caucasian | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino/a |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian and Alaska Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: specify _____ | |

2. How would you rank the socio-economic status of your family? For this question, consider how much your parent(s) make annually. Answer by drawing an "X" on scale where you feel best fits.



3. What gender do you identify with? _____

4. What is your age? _____

5. Below, indicate the highest level of education completed by your parent(s) or guardian(s). If in a single parent/guardian household, only complete question A. If you have two parents or two guardians, complete both A and B.

A. What is the highest level of education completed by your parent(s) or guardian(s)?

- 12th Grade or Less
- Graduated High School or Equivalent (GED)
- Some College, No Degree
- Associates Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Post-Graduate Degree

B. What is the highest level of education completed by your parent(s) or guardian(s)?

- 12th Grade or Less
- Graduated High School or Equivalent (GED)
- Some College, No Degree
- Associates Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Post-Graduate Degree

Section B.

6. Do you currently serve, or have you ever served in the military?

- Yes No

7. Do you know anyone who currently serves, or has previously served in the military?

- Yes No

a. If yes, who? Check all that apply:

- Parent Sibling
Friend Other: specify _____

b. If no, continue to next question.

Section C.

8. How many hours a week do you spend watching NFL content? _____

9. If you watch NFL content, do you only watch content from your home team?

- Yes, I only watch NFL content from my home team.
I watch some NFL content from other teams besides my home team.
I watch NFL content from a variety of teams.
I do not have any preference for the team I am watching.
I do not watch any NFL content.

10. How many hours a week do you spend watching professional sports content? _____

11. Did you participate in sports in high school?

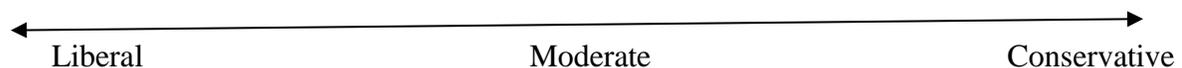
- Yes No

12. Did you attend sporting events in high school?

- Yes No
-

Section D.

13. How would you rank your political ideology? Answer by drawing an "X" on scale where you feel best fits.



14. Are you registered to vote?

- Yes No No, but I plan to register in the future

a. Did you vote in the last presidential election?

Yes No

b. Do you plan to vote/have already voted in the 2018 mid-term elections?

Yes No

c. Do you plan to vote in the next presidential election?

Yes No

15. For each statement, mark the box that best illustrates your personal attitudes or behaviors.

	1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes	4 Often	5 Always
I stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.					
I put my hand over my heart for the National Anthem.					
I am proud when I hear the United States' National Anthem.					
I am proud to be an American.					
I am proud when I see the United States' flag.					
The United States' flag symbolizes freedom of speech.					
I vote in state elections.					
I vote in national elections.					
The United States' flag symbolizes the military's sacrifice for this country.					
The Nation Anthem symbolizes the military's sacrifice for this country.					

16. In September 2016, the quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers of the National Football League, Colin Kaepernick, began the movement to protest during the national anthem. Kaepernick stated the purpose was to raise awareness about racial injustice in the criminal justice system. He first chose to sit during the national anthem to protest. Weeks later, after consulting with retired Green Beret and former NFL player Nate Boyer, Kaepernick chose to kneel instead, saying it was out of respect for the military. He then gained national attention for his silent protest.

For each statement, mark the box that best illustrates your personal attitudes.

	1 Strongly Oppose	2 Some- what Oppose	3 Neutral	4 Some- what Favor	5 Strongly Favor
Colin Kaepernick's National Anthem Protest					
Athletes protesting during professional sports					
Athletes being fined for silent protest during the National Anthem					
The NFL requiring players to stand for the anthem					
Black Americans speaking up against unfair treatment by the government makes our country better					
Some teams in the NFL allowing players to stay in the locker room during the national anthem					
Colin Kaepernick's reason for protest (see excerpt above)					
Black Lives Matter Movement					
The way Donald Trump handles race relations					
It is important to show support for your country by standing for the national anthem					
Americans speaking up against unfair treatment by the government makes our country better					

17. The NFL has a rule called the Rooney Rule, which required National Football League teams to interview minority candidates for head coaches and senior football operations opportunities. Do you agree with this rule?

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree

18. Professional athletes do not have the right to protest on the playing field or court.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree

19. On September 23rd, 2017 President Trump said via Twitter: *“If a player wants the privilege of making millions of dollars in the NFL, or other leagues, he or she should not be allowed to disrespect our Great American Flag (or Country) and should stand for the National Anthem. If not, YOU’RE FIRED. Find something else to do!”*

After reading the statement from Twitter, do you agree with Trump’s remarks regarding protesting in professional sports?

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree

20. For each statement, please indicate your beliefs towards the events.

	1 Strongly Oppose	2 Some- what Oppose	3 Neutral	4 Some- what Favor	5 Strongly Favor
Sitting down during the national anthem.					
Standing with raised fist during the national anthem.					
Kneeling during the national anthem.					
The NFL should punish players who refuse to stand for the national anthem was appropriate.					
NFL team owners should punish players who refuse to stand for the national anthem was appropriate.					
Standing with hand over heart for the national anthem.					
Standing with cap removed for the national anthem.					

21. For each item, indicate your belief in the acceptability of the item as a form of protest.

	1 Strongly Oppose	2 Some- what Oppose	3 Neutral	4 Some- what Favor	5 Strongly Favor
Candle-Lighting					
Fasting/Hunger Strike					
Petitioning					
Holding Signs/Picketing					
Marching					
Sloganeering/Chanting					
Press Conference					
Sit-Ins					
Blocking A Road					
Looting					
Meeting Disruption					
Letter Writing Campaign					
Blocking An Entrance to A Business					

The survey is now complete. Please place survey in envelope provided by researchers. If this survey caused you to experience any emotional disturbance, please contact the JMU Counseling Center at 504-568-6552.