

# Civic education through intercultural telecollaboration: studying embodied practices of social activism

Irina Golubeva and Ivett Guntersdorfer

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# Outline

- Pedagogies of Embodiment & Intercultural Competence
- Project between students from Germany and the USA: *Exploring embodied practices of social protests*
- Intercultural telecollaborative project outcomes & findings
- Discussion



# Pedagogies of embodiment?

Embodiment has emerged as a concept that **broadens the focus on the body** beyond the dualistic natural scientific point of view.

Research into embodied learning and embodiment has had various focuses, e.g.:

- the sociological aspects of embodiment and
- the embodied experiences of students.

(Aartun et al., 2020)

# Why pedagogies of embodiment for IC?

- our body is our social and emotional sense organ (e.g. Blake, 2018, Caldwell, 2018, Feldman – Barrett, 2017)
- for a deeper self-awareness and for a better perception of others, connecting the body with our cognitive mind is crucial (e.g. Fogel, 2009, Siegel, 2010, Shaules, 2015)



pedagogies of embodiment may facilitate:

- higher awareness about our cultural frames
- deeper intercultural learning



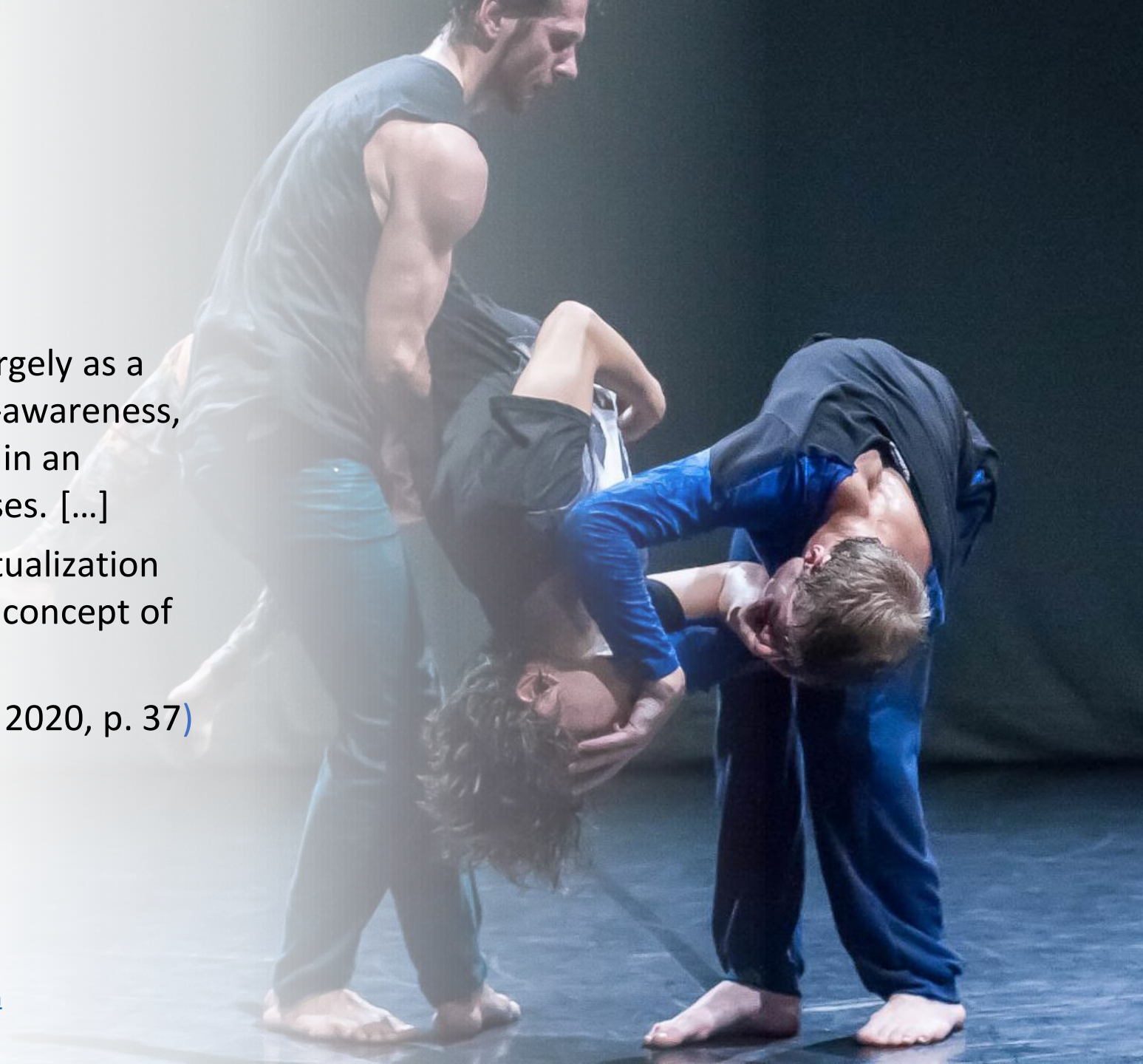
## Why pedagogies of embodiment for IC?

Bennett treats the ability to empathize largely as a phenomenon of interpretation and meta-awareness, and does not, by and large, root his ideas in an embodied view of neurocognitive processes. [...]

Sparrow (2000) has criticized this conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity as a “Cartesian concept of a mind, detached from experience”.

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(Shaules, 2020, p. 37)





# Collective Body Memory

The social interactions that shape the individual body memory usually follow certain patterns, styles, and rhythms (e.g., turn-taking), and they are often directed toward shared goals. [...] We might also speak of “participation genres,” such as joint play, shared meals, salutations, queuing, bedtime rituals, and the like. Since such habitual or ritualized forms of embodied interaction are possible only in dyads or groups, the question arises whether **we can also posit a superindividual level of memory formation, resulting in what may be termed collective body memory.**

(T. Fuchs, 2020, pp. 333-334)

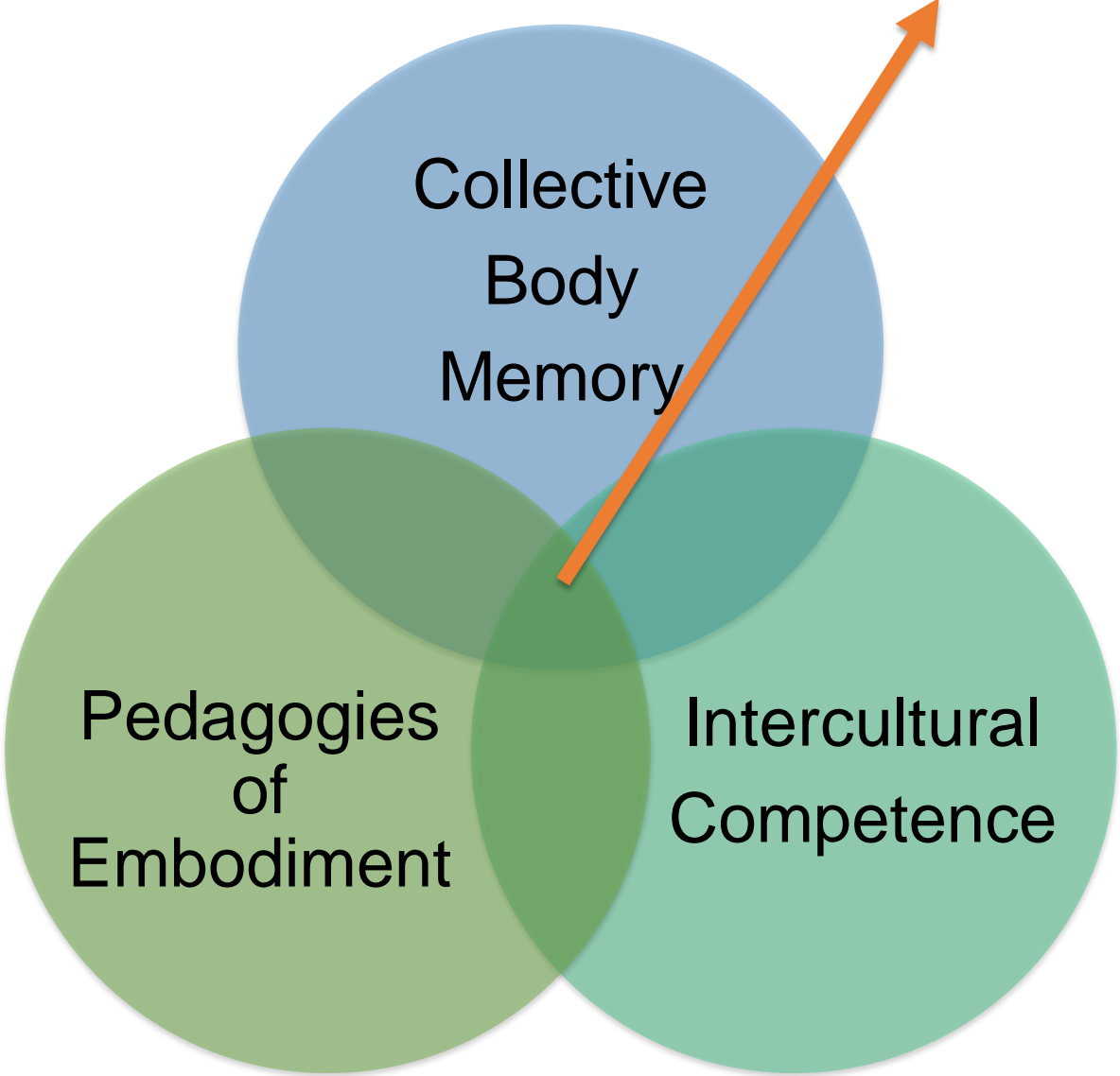


# Social Protests – Places of Collective Body Memory

“The occupation of public space by signifying bodies is basic for activism. The visibility of demonstrating bodies confronts social meanings, enacts social claims and shapes social imaginaries about the protest and the protesters. Bodies are not just mediators of protest: they are protest.” (Enguix, 2012, para. 1)

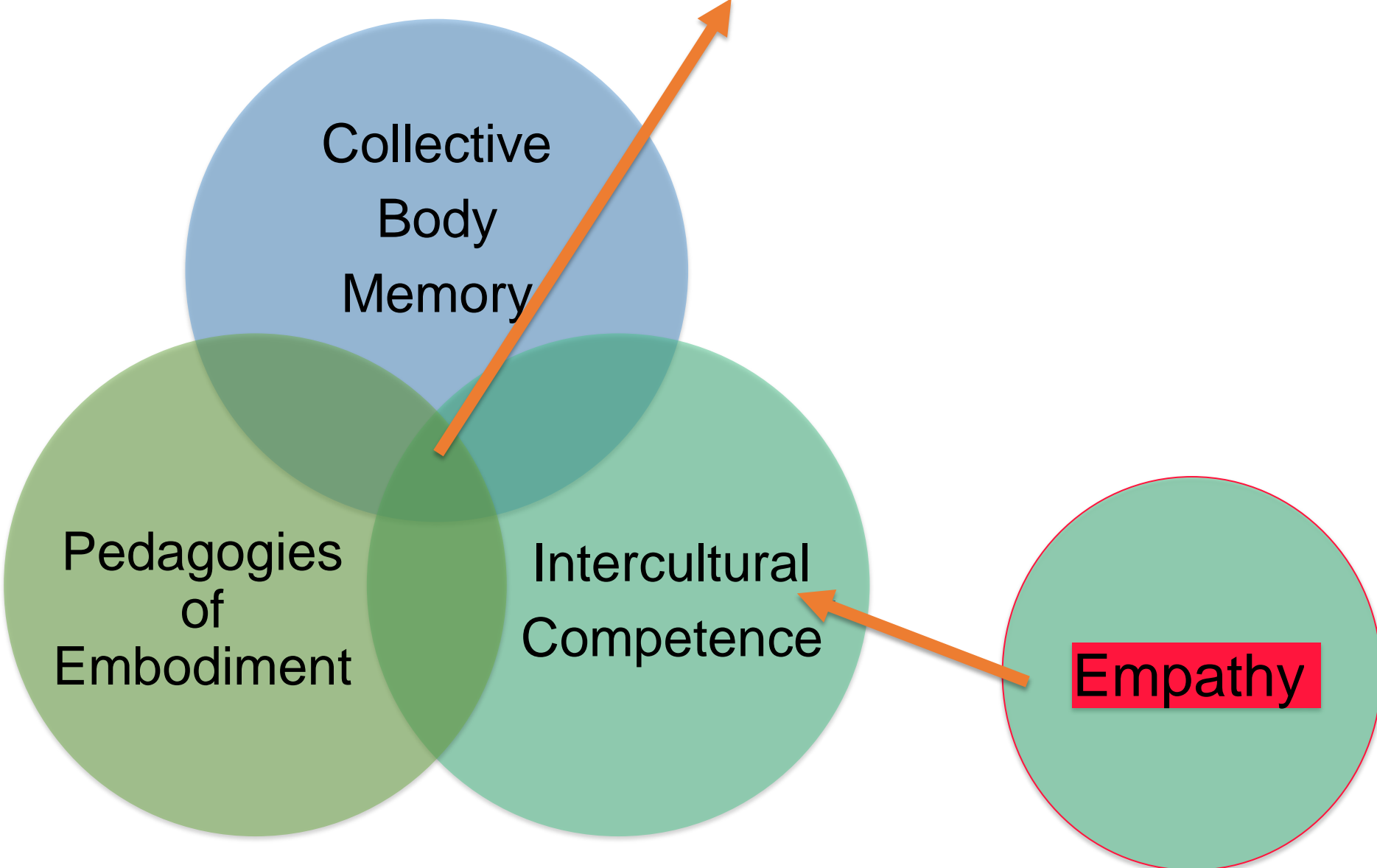


# Pedagogies of Embodiment for Intercultural Competence





# Pedagogies of Embodiment for Intercultural Competence



# Empathy

## 1. Why Important for IC?

A basic element in most IC-models for a high intercultural competence we must be able to feel/resonate with others and regulate our emotions accordingly (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2019)

## 2. Empathy through Virtual Exchange? (research gap)

Truax and Carkhuff (1967) Empathic responding

- Level 1 - low level (little or no awareness of feeling)
- Level 2 - moderately low level (some awareness)
- Level 3 - reciprocal level of empathic responding (accurate reflection of client's message reflected at the level in which it was given - paraphrasing with the appropriate feeling word)
- Level 4 - moderately high level of empathic responding (reflecting not only the accurate feeling but the underlying feeling)
- Level 5 - high level of empathic responding (accurate reflection of feeling, plus underlying feelings in greater breadth and depth (also for some interpretation such a deep disappointment or long-range goals).





# Rationale of research and RQs

## 1. Why Important for IC?

Collective body memory - identity formations central topics for intercultural communication (Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020)

## 2. Intercultural Learning through Virtual Exchange?

Embodied activities/experiences highly limited (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016, Golubeva & Guntersdorfer, 2018, Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2020)



- How can intercultural learning take place in a virtual exchange, in which embodied activities are recalled or reinforced?
- How emotions (empathy) and embodiment play a role in these recollections?

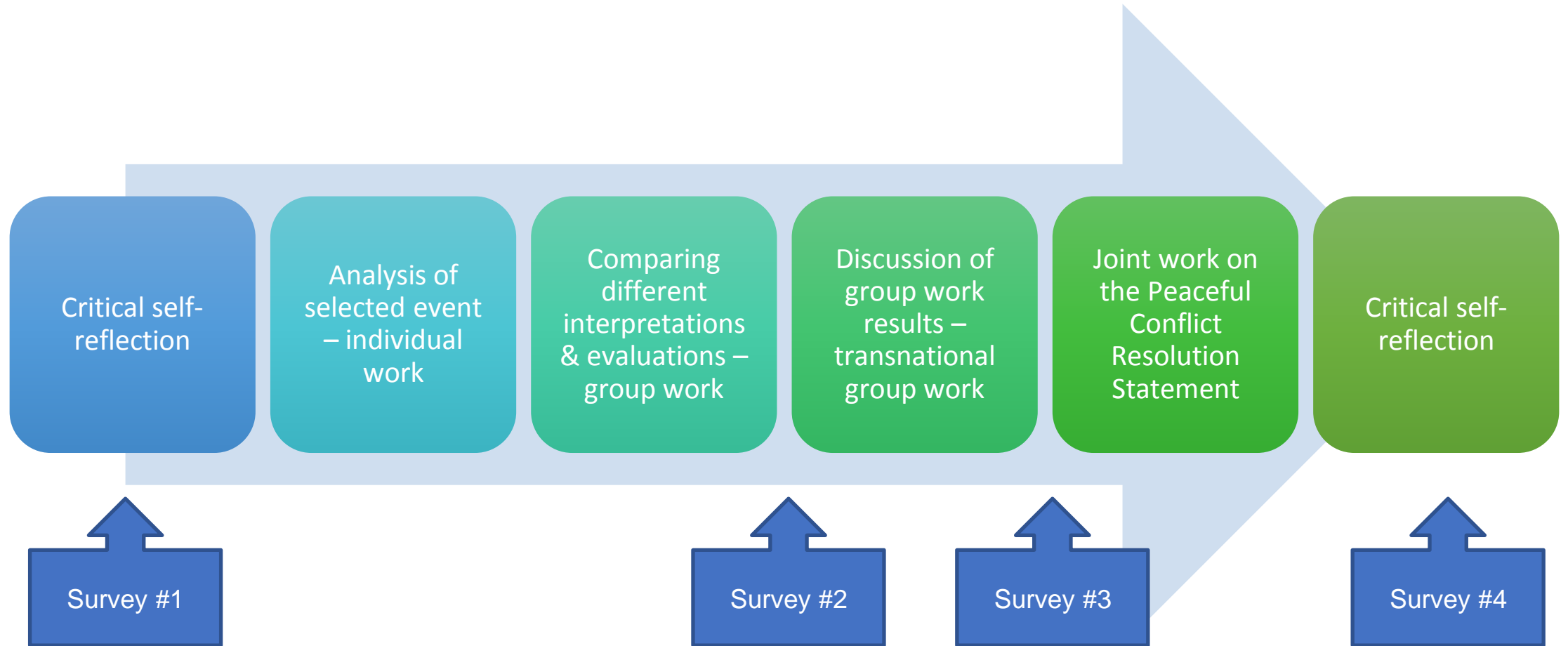




# 'Exploring embodied practices of social protests' - intercultural telecollaborative project

- Intercultural telecollaborative project (4 weeks in January 2021) between students from LMU (Germany) and UMBC (USA)
- 13 *Intercultural Communication* MA students from LMU (Germany) and 20 *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* BA students from UMBC (USA)
- Learning objectives of the project:
  - To actively learn about the importance of body language awareness
  - To reflect on students' own and others' emotions
  - To explore the interrelationship of body and emotions in human behaviour
  - To develop skills for a better understanding of messages and impulses of the body

# Stages of the project



(see Golubeva & Guntersdorfer, 2020; cf. Porto, Golubeva, & Byram, forthcoming)

# Events chosen by students

Black Lives Matter / George Floyd  
Protests

Black Friday Amazon workers' protests

The Capitol Riot

SARS Protests in Nigeria

COVID Protests in Germany

Awareness for Moria (Greece), etc.



Image sources:

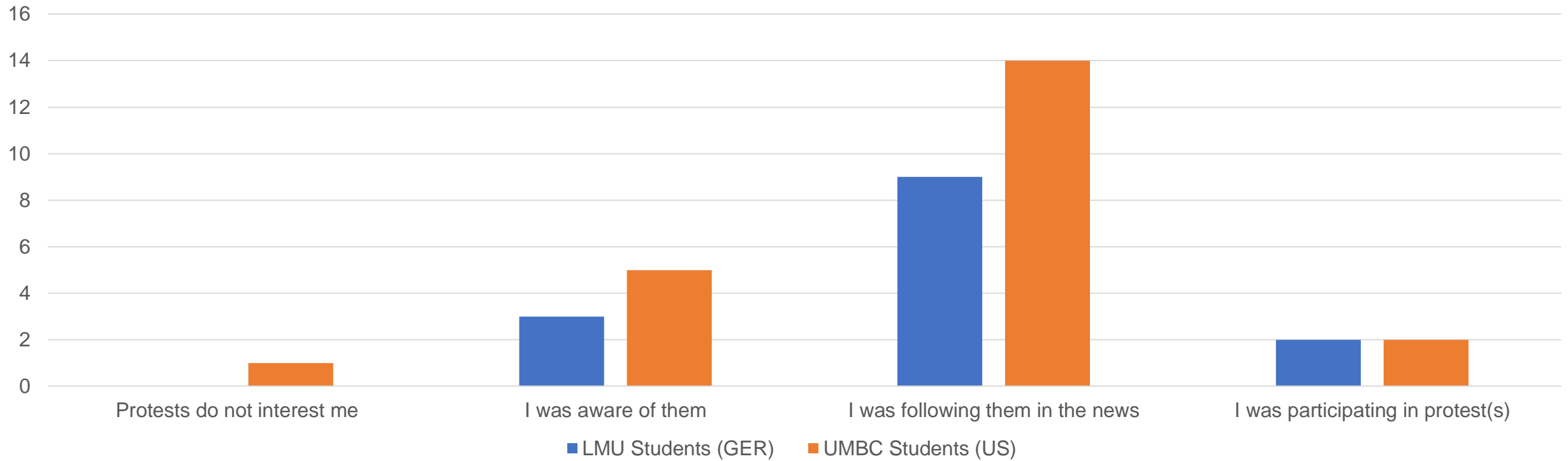
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<https://www.businessinsider.com/amazon-protesters-visit-jeff-bezos-california-house-demand-wage-increase-2020-10>



# About participation in protests during the pandemic



<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>

# What emotions did this event cause you to feel?

Of course, I will never be able to understand in a full extent, as I have never experienced that kind of racism or discrimination. Yet, I felt hurt myself and moved about those single - and collective - injuries. I had to think of stories told by friends and of things I had observed before. I am aware that change takes its time but some things are nevertheless unacceptable. I also felt glad, honestly, that people went out and demonstrated - especially because I didn't, I was all the more "happier".

This event was just another evidence for the tardiness in COVID-19 action from the state government that made me disappointed

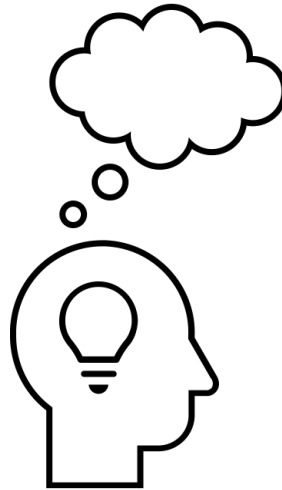
I received many important items shipped from Amazon, such as masks, water, and surgical gloves. Without these warehouse workers, my quality of life and safety would have been diminished. Therefore, I am concerned about these workers that work hard to make my life safer.

BLM: fear, anger, injustice;  
Corona protests: fear, incomprehension, annoyance

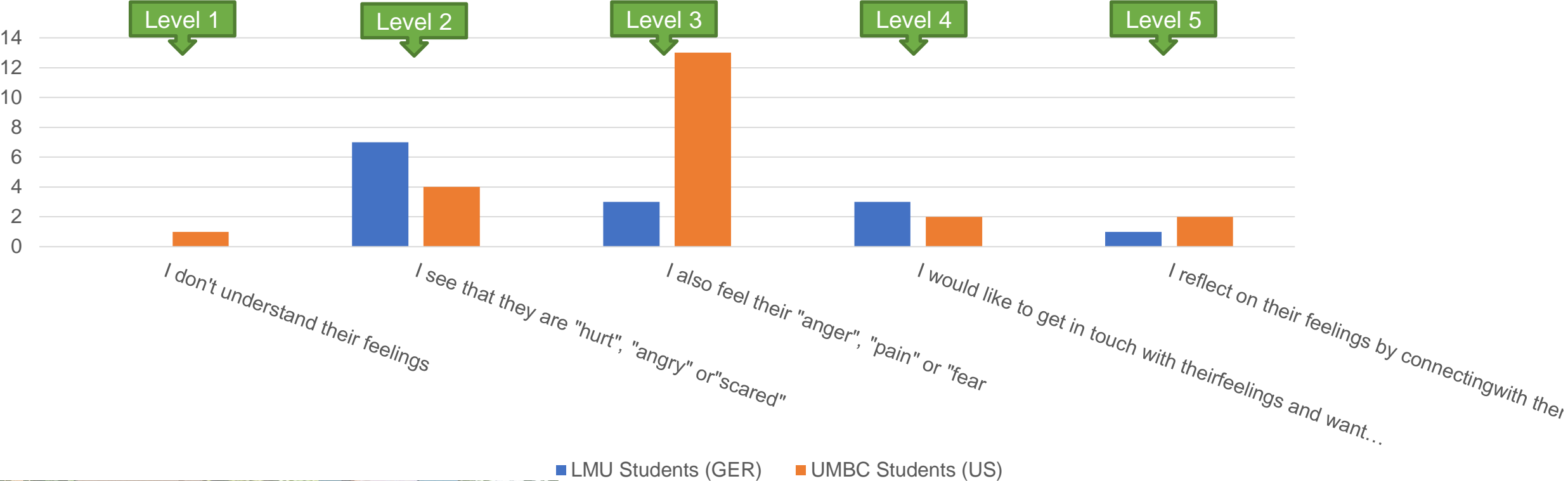
afraid, disappointed, tired of having to deal with COVID-deniers

The emotion it caused in me was hope. It gave me hope that minorities/blacks will one day get equal rights and treatment by taking a stand and demanding change

I felt the need to participate in a protest myself. It was a duty of mine. I wanted to be safe with the pandemic and violence increasing around those demonstrations. I went to the Court house in Bel Air and marched with a hundred others to the police station. I felt angry and empathetic to the racial injustices that occurred. I understood that if black lives don't matter then Arabs, Mexicans, Asian etc lives don't matter either. I fight for others because I want to be fought for in those situations.



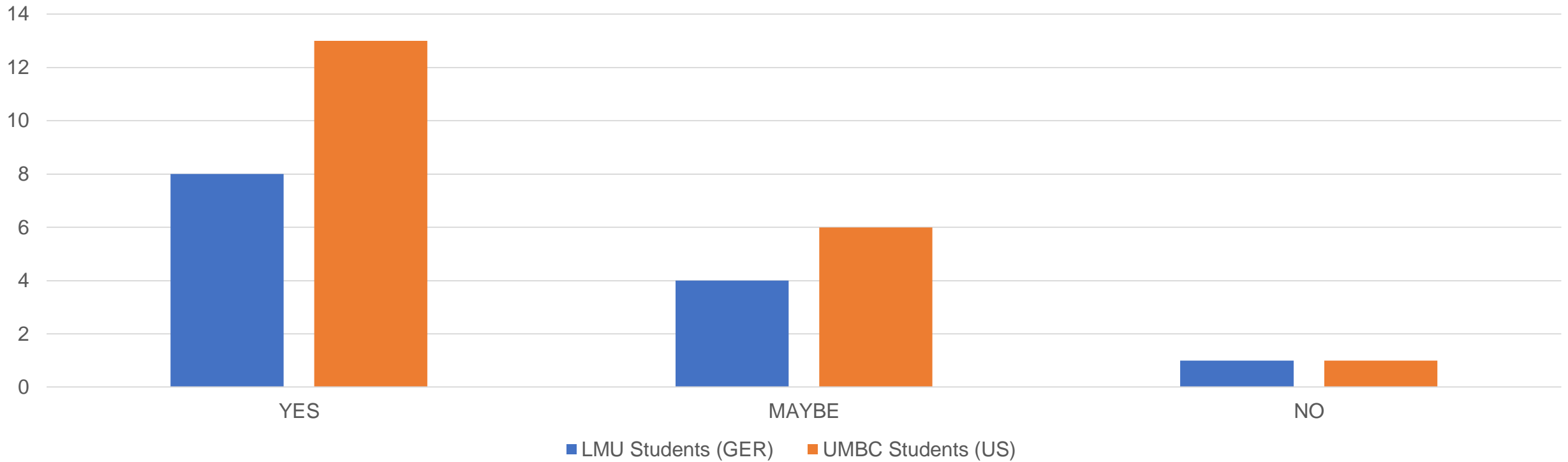
# When I see protesters ...



<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>

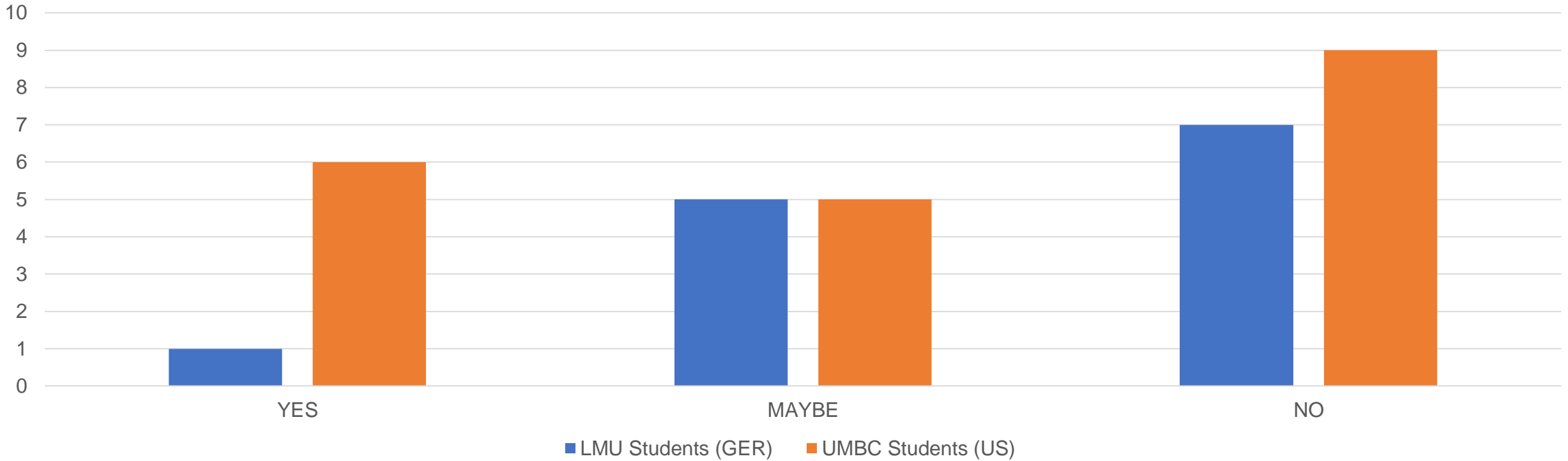


# Do you think you can recollect well the emotions of other students?



<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>

# Is it difficult for you to verbalize these emotions?



# Working on the Peaceful Conflict Resolution Statement: adjectives used to describe the peers in their group

## LMU (Germany) students

- Happy
- Excited
- Motivated
- Compassionate
- Annoyed (about technical issues of virtual collaboration)
- Bored
- Distanced
- Ready to engage in action
- Curious
- Focused
- Open
- CreACTIVE

## UMBC (USA) students

- Positive
- Excited (to find the best solutions)
- Optimistic
- Enthusiastic
- Patient
- Attentive
- Vocal about their opinions
- Nervous
- Calm
- Hardworking
- Interested
- Focused
- Open-minded
- Creative




# How did you judge the emotional state of your transatlantic peers?

- I mostly rely on nonverbal signals like facial expressions
- I have not practiced this skill in real life in a while. But I usually can tell, if their chest is pointed a certain way with a strong stance, it means they are open and interested
- All were very interested because everyone was seated with good posture in their seats, and all contributed with enthusiasm to make their points
- Hard to say, because I couldn't see most of them...but I would say that some of them were shy and maybe they were stressed or bored...
- Compassion and empathy was expressed through mimics

# Peaceful Conflict Resolution: Statement & Poster

**MORE CREACTIVITY**




Spread positivity!  
Smile!  
Hold Hands!  
Community!

social media project #blackoutuesday  
propose solutions!  
posters

**There are many ways to Protest!**  
**KEEP THE PEACE!**

dancing #fridayforfuture)  
Communicate  
Poetry

LET'S KEEP THE PEACE!  
Many ways



## Ideas for a More Peaceful Protest



- Online
  - De-Militarization
  - More focus on the community (communication and trust-building)
  - Reduction of predictive policing
  - More diversity and diversity training
  - Emphasis on de-escalation tactics
- (Social) Media
  - Enforce rules equally
  - Change language used when talking

- Wearing T-shirts with a certain message, or colour
- Bike tour with ringing bells
- Showing unity by holding hands
- Singing
- Dancing
- "Poetry slam"
- Signing petitions
- Posters on balconies or windows
- Planting trees
- Boycott of products
- Turning on and off your lights
- Chaining oneself
- Using symbols or signs, etc.

# PEACEFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

PEACEFUL PROTESTS REQUIRE MORE PLANNING, ORGANIZATION, AND TRAINING FOR DE-ESCALATION TACTICS AND THUS HAVE TO BE MORE THOUGHT OUT THAN SUDDEN MASS DISTURBANCES.

**NON VIOLENT METHODS**  
Boycotts - Labor strikes: allow the masses to shift the power through peaceful means of resistance by utilizing their economic power.  
Picketing - Petitioning - Vigils - Social media Campaigns - Press conferences - Inform the public about the cause and creatively transform and prevent conflict.  
Artistic performances encourage interactive participation, expression of ideas in the public sphere, reach new audiences.

**DE-ESCALATION**  
Prevent infighting: Participants should recognize when conflict is escalating: identify hostile gestures and be sure not to mirror them, be sensitive when engaging with others, aware of your body and how you are being perceived by others (physical appearance). If prompted to argue: always respond peacefully and never internalize others' misplaced anger.

**ORGANIZATION**  
Backlash by counterprotesters or authority figures should be expected and prepared for in the organizing stage.

**WHEN PAIRED WITH PEACEBUILDING TACTICS, NONVIOLENT CAN ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE PEACE, RAISE AWARENESS OF A CAUSE, PRESSURE AUTHORITY, INSPIRE OR PUSH LEGISLATION, AND GARNER MORE SUPPORTERS BY EXTINGUISHING HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS**

**ORGANIZE**  
Organizing on a larger scale is easier than it seems. It's about creating a sense of community and shared purpose. It's about building relationships and trust. It's about being prepared for anything that might happen.

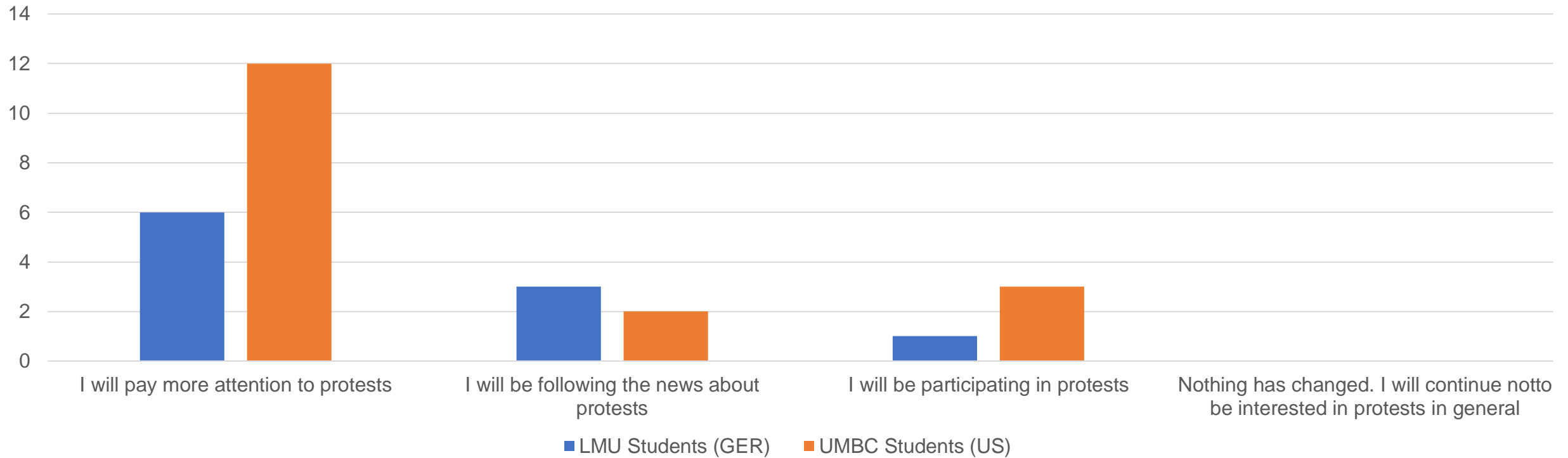
**PREPARE**  
When engaging with opposing groups: discourage interaction, document violent encounters, endure arrests without resisting or speaking officers. Protesting through these nonviolent means benefits the community by bringing the tension necessary for social change, but without damaging property or relationships.

**IDENTIFY AND ACT**  
Participants should recognize when conflict is escalating: identify hostile gestures and not mirror them. When engaging with others: be sensitive, aware of your body and how you are being perceived by others (physical appearance). If prompted to argue: always respond peacefully and never internalize others' misplaced anger.





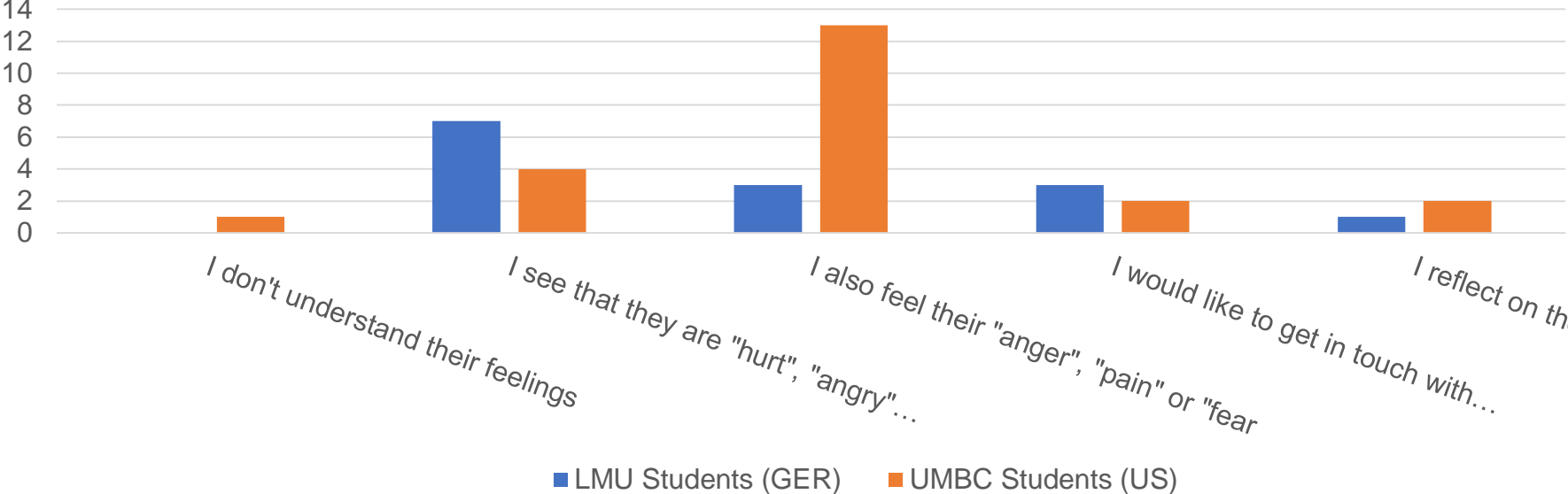
# After having completed this project, this is how I feel about protests...



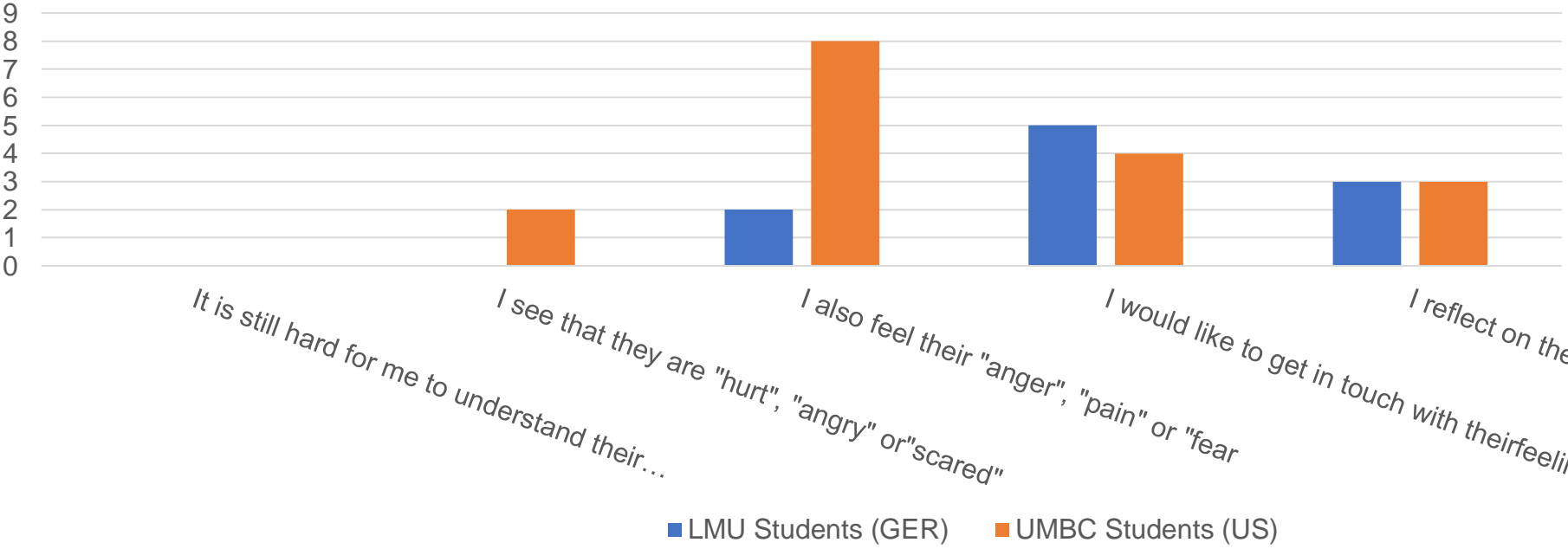
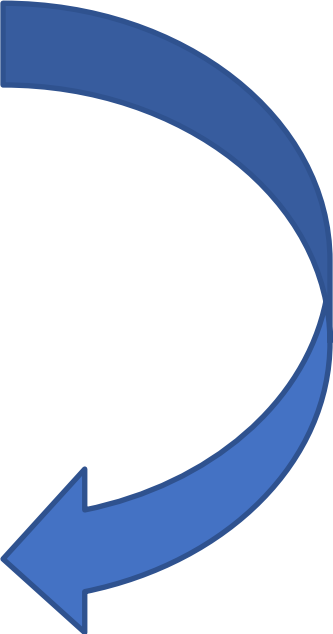
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# When I see protesters ...



BEFORE THE PROJECT



AFTER THE PROJECT

Certainly. I learned a great deal about social/political protests from my peers. I learned about the different styles of protesting, and how different countries reacted to different conflicts.

Do you think addressing the topic of social protests in a virtual project with students from another country can be beneficial for your intercultural development?

I think this mini-project really helped break my comfort zone. I think it allows people to become more open-minded and experience cultures from different parts of the world. I heard of a stereotype that Germany was a very strict country, but speaking with my virtual exchange group, I realized that that was not the case. They are still strict but, at least during protests, the country allows people to share their voice peacefully

I think it is beneficial for intercultural development because, in order to have an active conversation, you have to reflect on your own biases and values and see how your culture and environment mold you so you can understand how different ideologies form

I think the topic of protests can be very beneficial because it introduces social issues which are always colored by strong emotions and cultural differences. In our case it was especially well chosen because of the recent events.

Yes, very much so. The topic of social protests is very timely and appropriate. To listen to different viewpoints from a different country, in this case Germany, was a valuable experience since I was able to learn that it is indeed a small world after all.

I would definitely say yes, because by mere talking about our different opinions and perceptions of those events helped me broaden my horizon. [...] It also made me reflect more about my own body display in communication, and hopefully helps me to improve these displays in intercultural interactions.

Yes! Because it will teach me to be always open minded about things not sometimes but all the time.



## Discussion Question

How do you see the potential of studying emotionally charged events like social protests for developing body awareness in the context of an intercultural virtual exchange?



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Thank you for your kind attention!

golubeva@umbc.edu  
i.guntersdorfer@ikk.lmu.de