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# The Ritual of Riots: An Examination of University and College Riots, 1990 – 2009

Sandra Marker\*

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**Abstract**      Between 1990 and 2009 a wave of student riots washed across 52 college campuses and communities in the United States. Over 100 riots erupted from student festivities and sporting events. On a cursory level, today's student riots in contrast to past Vietnam War Era campus riots that had a specific goal (i.e., ending the war), seem to have no particular aim nor objective other than the consumption of alcohol. This has led researchers to presume that excessive student drinking is a significant causal factor to these events; however, findings from initial student riot studies indicate that alcohol is neither a causal nor predictive factor of today's student riots. As such, the objective of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to ascertain what if any student riot patterns, processes and/or situational conditions may be causal or predictive to contemporary student riots. Second, this examination endeavors to determine if student riots are in fact issueless, not motivated by any purposeful goal or will to bring about social change.

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## INTRODUCTION

Between 1990 and 2009, 52 university communities in 26 states experienced more than 100 riots composed predominately of students.<sup>1</sup> The events which range in size from 30 to more than 1000 actors emanated from student parties, holiday celebrations, college sporting events, annual festivals, and the early closing of student drinking establishments. Due to the fact that the riots prevailingly emerged from festive type of situations that involved the

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<sup>1</sup> This study's definition of riot is the same general definition of riot used by sociologist Seymour Spilerman (1970), "a violent collective incident involving 30 or more participants" (p. 630). This definition, albeit with some variation, has also been adopted by other sociological riot researchers—e.g., Carter 1986; McPhail and Wohlstein 1983).

excessive consumption of alcohol, researchers refer to the student disturbances as *party riots* (Madensen and Eck 2006) and *celebratory riots* (Ohio State University 2003). Moreover, they presume the cause of these disruptive and materially damaging events to be excessive levels of student drinking. This assumed cause has led many researchers to deem today's student riots to be what sociologist Gary Marx (1970) calls *issueless riots*; riots that have no intentional goal and that are not motivated by a willful desire to bring about social change.<sup>1</sup> Today's student riots are thus considered to be vastly different from the recognized purposeful student riots that occurred during the Vietnam War Era which had an expressed goal to end the war.

Due to the fact that today's student riots are linked to alcohol rather than to a social issue or cause, university communities and campuses that seek to curtail the occurrence of these events focus their attention almost exclusively on trying to inhibit student drinking. Efforts to decrease student rioting include changing and/or enacting new alcohol use ordinances and laws, and/or stepping up alcohol enforcement policies. These alcohol restrictive actions, however, have not resulted in the mitigation of student riots (Russell 2004). Rather, campus and community drinking deterrence actions appear to evoke new and more intense incidents (Kaplowitz and Campo 2004). Since the late 1990s when campuses and college communities purposefully initiated prohibitive alcohol use policies and increased the enforcement of drinking laws, dozens of new student riots have taken place. Many of these events resulted in severe levels of property damage and injuries to both rioters and riot responders (Byyny and Stump 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> Sociologist Gary Marx (1970) suggests a riot typology that takes into account both actor ideology and the actors' desire to bring about social change. Based on these two factors he identifies three types of riots: (1) instrumental riots which have a generalized belief present; (2) riots that have a generalized belief but are not instrumental in nature; and (3) issueless riots (e.g., victory riots), which are "unprincipled" in terms of the fact that they lack a protest belief and as such have only a slight implication for social change (p. 21).

The intensification of student riots following the enactment of restrictive alcohol policies led researchers to question the assumption that alcohol is a significant causal factor. Research was directed to examine the relationship between student riots and student drinking. Findings from these initial studies indicate that the consumption of alcohol is neither a significant causal nor predictive factor to contemporary student riots (Buettner 2004).<sup>1</sup> These findings have led to uncertainty about the root source of these student events. As such, this study endeavors to add more clarity and understanding to our knowledge of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century student riots. Foremost it aims to determine what factors and/or conditions are significant to the occurrence and/or prediction of student riots. Additionally, it strives to ascertain if contemporary student riots are as presumed issueless, without a goal or aspiration to bring about some kind of social change.

#### METHOD

This study's examination process will be led by an *event-centered* perspective from the sociological field of collective action. This theoretical stance is used because it allows collective action events (e.g., riots) to be conceptualized through the analysis of their predisposing conditions and situational factors (Sacco and Kennedy 2008). As such, this study in its effort to enhance the understanding of student riots will methodically and meticulously examine the situational conditions, defined patterns and predominant characteristics of over 100 student riots.

More specifically, data on 106 student riots that occurred between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2009 will be examined using a qualitative content methodology that is guided by

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<sup>1</sup> The final report from the 2003 *Ohio State University Task Force on Preventing Celebratory Riots* concludes alcohol is not a significant cause of celebratory riots because "excessive and high-risk drinking" occurs on a regular basis at similar events and gatherings and yet does not lead to student riots (p. 35).

grounded theory. This method of analysis is selected because it has a category development aspect that will enable the researcher to extract meaning from the emergent data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This approach further offers the potential for gaining new insights into student riots through an increased understanding that comes out from the data and which can implicitly be used to build a theoretical model (Gillis and Jackson 2002).

### *Coding Process*

Analysis of the data will include a procedure that subjects the riot data to a three-phase coding process comprised of *open coding*, *axial coding* and *selective coding*. This type of coding operation is both methodical and extensive and yields definitive descriptive *categories and sub-categories* from the textual data. These explicit classifications are fundamental to initiating a rudimentary framework that can give rise to the emergence of a theoretical model (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

During the initial open coding stage, newspaper reports are broken down and coded based on simple queries (e.g., where was the event located, when did the event begin). Next, the textual data are split apart sentence by sentence and compared and analyzed for similarities. The data are subsequently examined for recurring patterns, concepts, words and/or phrases that bring meaning to the data. As themes and sub-themes emerge from the data (e.g., triggering event, student neighborhoods), they are entered into a spreadsheet. Pertinent data segments from each riot report are subsequently entered under each of the appropriate thematic categories.

After the splintered data has been entered into the spreadsheet, axial coding is used to bring the data back together, albeit in a different form. During this coding stage relational aspects that exist between the different categories and sub-categories are ascertained, delineated (e.g., X occurs before Y, if X then Y) and entered into the spreadsheet. During the

entire coding process, data are continuously compared, checked, examined and reexamined to make sure the coding accurately reflects what is in the data. This constant evaluation and comparison process promotes accuracy in coding and also acts as a validity check (Strauss and Corbin 1994).

At the end of the axial coding phase, selective coding begins. This analytical process involves the integration of all of the descriptive thematic categories and sub-categories that were developed in the earlier coding process. This entails a process of assembling the overall fundamental findings in a way that precisely incorporates all of the categories and sub-categories together in a way that accurately portrays their relational linkages and directional aspects. The potential for a theoretical model emerges out of this exacting assemblage process.

Following the coding phase of the data analysis, a quantitative procedure is conducted. This operation step includes quantifying the number of events that exhibit each of the identified themes and sub-themes. For example, if a category *trigger event* is extracted from the overall riot data, each individual riot's data is combed to see if it exhibits the presence of a trigger event. The number of events that the data identifies as positively or negatively displaying the theme and sub-theme is then quantified to indicate the number of riots that manifest each particular element or characteristic.

### *Data*

This study uses newspaper reports as the primary source of data. This type of data is used because as so often is the case for multiple collective action events, they are the only attainable source of data (Earl et al. 2004; Franzosi 1987). Newspaper reports are also used because they afford a strong probability of disclosing collective action event (e.g., student riots), predisposing elements and situational conditions (Earl et al. 2004).

Convenience sampling is used to compile 106 applicable student riots for this study. Due to research constraints associated with time and money and to the fact that there are no sources or indexes that list student riots, this type of sampling is deemed to be the most appropriate. Between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2009, 106 events were identified that:

- ranged in size from 30 actors to upwards of 1000 actors,
- included students from 52 campuses located in 26 states,
- took place in urban, suburban and rural campus settings,
- arose from events that included parties, sporting events, festivals, holiday celebrations and bar closings.

The data elicited facts about student riot conditions, patterns and factors and their directional relationships. The data also imparted explicit statements by actors, bystanders, community leaders, campus authorities and both local and campus police. These narrative accounts by actors, riot responders and observers bring a robust richness to the data descriptive elements. This dense depictive accounting astutely enhanced the taxonomy of themes and sub-themes that were identified in the student riot data.

The time period between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2009 was chosen for analysis based on both convenience and on the fact that the time period yielded a reasonable cross-section of student riots. Moreover, by December 31, 2009, the identified riot themes and sub-themes had been saturated by data collected on 106 events; data were no longer offering new categories or expanding already identified student riot categories and sub-categories.

Limitations associated with using newspaper reports for data include having to rely on both questions embedded in the news reports and on respondents selected by news reporters. Additionally, newspaper data is deemed to have two types of biases, *sample selection bias* and *description bias*. Sample selection bias can occur if news agencies slant information in a certain

direction. Comparatively, description bias arises from the descriptive aspects of both *hard news* (i.e. the who, what, when, where, and why of the event) and *soft news* (i.e. perceptions and conjectures of reporters and commentators) embedded in newspaper reports. This study acts to reduce both sample selection bias and description bias by using multiple news sources (Earl et al. 2004).

Initially, the riot reports assembled for this study came from 12 prominent US newspapers (see Table 1). The 12 newspapers were chosen based on their diverse geographic printing and distribution ranges and on their ability to be electronically searched. News report searches began on January 1, 1990 and ended on December 31, 2009. The initial searches that examined reports dating from January 1, 1990, through December 31, 2004, were executed by the University of Colorado's *Dialog@Carl* search system. The remaining news source searches taking place between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2009, were performed by the search engine *Google*.

Reports from the 12 leading newspapers were searched for the following terms: riot, melee, or disorder. Each positive search "hit" was scrupulously examined and reports that had data about US college or university student events that fit this study's definition of riot were collected. Once an applicable event was identified objective information about the riot (i.e. date and location of an event) was extracted from the report. This information was used to search for additional reports in news sources located near the city where the event occurred and/or on the university campus identified in the initial search. The mined data that came from additional news sources other than the 12 original newspapers (e.g., local riot city community papers and riot campus papers), contributed to the verification of the objective data (i.e. riot dates, times, and locations) and to the deep richness of the descriptive elements (Myers 1997). Data from additional news sources also contributed to a more comprehensive assemblage of statements

**Table 1** Twelve Prominent U.S. Newspapers

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Location</i>
Atlanta Constitution	Atlanta, GA
Boston Globe	Boston, MA
Chicago Tribune	Chicago, IL
Detroit Free Press	Detroit, MI
Houston Chronicle	Houston, TX
Los Angeles Times	Los Angeles, CA
Miami Herald	Miami, FL
New York Times	New York, NY
Philadelphia Inquirer	Philadelphia, PA
Seattle Post-Intelligencer	Seattle, WA
Seattle Times	Seattle, WA
Washington Post	Washington, DC

made by riot participants, local riot area authorities, university leaders, riot respondents (i.e., local and campus police officers), bystanders, and riot community members.

#### FINDINGS

The coding and analysis phase of this study resulted in the emergence of five distinctive riot themes or categories (see Table 2): (1) *change in group's status*, (2) *trigger event*, (3) *riot*,

**Table 2** Reported Characteristics of U.S. College Riots 1990 – 2009 (N = 106)

Categories and Subcategories	%	(n)
<i>Change in Group Status:</i>		
Change in Student Lifestyle and Honor	72	(76)
Change in Student Honor	28	(30)
<i>Trigger Event:</i>		
Intervening Police Action	72	(76)
End of Sports Competition	28	(30)
<i>Spatial Characteristics of Initial Riot Area:</i>		
Dense Student Housing	69	(73)
Areas Where Students Typically Congregate	16	(17)
Area In or Near an Event Facility	15	(16)
<i>Riot Temporal Factors:</i>		
Predominant and Peak Time of Rioting:		
Night	100	(106)
Day	0	(0)
<i>Rioter Actions:</i>		
Throwing Rocks and Other Objects		
Yes	100	(106)
No	0	(0)
Damaging Property		
Yes	100	(106)
No	0	(0)
Setting Fires		
Yes	65	(69)
No	35	(37)
<i>Response to Riot:</i>		
Formal	77	(82)
Informal	23	(24)
<i>Riot Location:</i>		
Riot in Area Unique to Single Event	30	(32)
Informal	70	(74)

(4) *response to riot*, and (5) *group relations restored or strained*. Regarding the first category, change in group's status, the data indicates that prior to each period of riotous activity students experience a real or perceived change in their *status* or social position. The term status is defined in this study by classical sociologist Max Weber (1958:405), "[s]tatus' is a quality of social honor or a lack of it and is in the main conditioned as well as expressed through a specific style of life." Based upon this definition, a change in status is assumed if a student reports a real or perceived change in their *lifestyle* (e.g., ability to consume alcohol, ability to share housing space and expenses with others, ability to congregate with friends in desired locations, ability to have large parties, ability to drink during certain hours at local bars) and/or their level of student *honor* (i.e. respect, dignity, deference, esteem).

Prior to the onset of each of the 106 riots students reported a perceived change in their status. In 76 of the student riots it was reported that new laws or policies by state, local or campus authorities had been enacted that led to an alteration in student norms, i.e. *lifestyle*. For example, students reported that their customary patterns associated with their ability to purchase and/or consume alcohol had been changed by new policies and/or ordinances. These findings are supported by Buettner's study (2004) of late twentieth century, mixed-issue, campus disturbances that suggests changes in state drinking age laws from 18 or 19 to 21 years of age may be a contributing factor to the student riots. Buettner (2004:10 – 11) defines mixed-issue campus disturbances as "campus disturbances that result in a public conflict between aggregates of participants (mostly students) and authorities (usually the police), but that do not begin as an issue-based protest gathering."<sup>1</sup> Other norm changes mentioned by students in this study include new laws regulating the number of people who could live in a

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<sup>1</sup> Buettner (2004) states that mixed-issue riots are most frequently associated with sporting events, they can also occur in connection with holidays, festivals, and impromptu student gatherings or parties.

rental housing unit and the size of party students could give. These points are exemplified in the following newspaper report that describes how the status of students and student norms or typical life patterns associated with drinking and housing had been altered by local dictates prior to the 1997 and 1998 Michigan State University (MSU) riots:

Students cite recent crackdowns on underage drinking and stricter city regulations on rental housing as evidence of harassment. Since 1995, police have been able to issue a citation to any minor they suspect of drinking alcohol. The person no longer has to actually have a drink in hand. The numbers of alcohol citations tell the story: In 1991, there were 487; in 1996, 927; and last year [1997], 1,285 (Gendreau 1998:1).

A report from the Manchester, New Hampshire, newspaper further describes how policy changes implemented by Plymouth State College (PSC) prior to the 1998 riot affected students' normal practices:

Students said the rebellion [1998 PSC riot] was triggered, in part by President Donald Wharton's recent efforts to pressure off-campus landlords to prohibit large parties, and a new ordinance that students complain makes such gatherings almost impossible to organize (Tracy 1998:1A).

In addition, Paul Murphy, a history major at MSU describes how changes to MSU's drinking policies not only impacted students' lifestyles but also affected their honor:

The University and East Lansing have shown little respect for the students that allow them to exist. The passing of Ordinance 900 during the summer, the shortening of Welcome Week and the 9 a.m. opening of Munn field are all things the city or MSU have done without student input.

The overzealous attack on underage drinking steps on students' rights and creates as many problems as it claims to solve. It is too bad that students took their anger out on police officers Sunday morning because all along the officers have only been doing their jobs: upholding ridiculous policies that a disrespectful university and city adopt to curb the very activities that they themselves participated in when they were our age (Murphy 1997:1B).

Moreover, Jennifer Frank, a departing University of Colorado (CU) Student Union Executive, further relates how the status of CU students and thus their honor had been diminished prior to the May 1997 CU riot when she contends in her statement that policy

changes that had been initiated by the city of Boulder authorities effectively relegated students to a lower social standing:

There's a real concern, no, a frustration, at the way they've [students] been treated by the city. They feel they've been put down to second-class citizens (qtd. in "Cops Keep Lid on After 2 Nights of Riots in Colorado" 1997:8).

Henry Portner, a University of Oregon (UO) senior who had frequent interactions with the UO Office of Public Safety (OPS) and the Eugene police for four years, reiterates Frank's feelings as he explains that policy changes implemented by the OPS and the Eugene police department, "basically ignore the fact that I'm a person and use their role as police officer to make me feel inferior to them" (qtd. in Wyer 1998:1).

The data on the remaining 30 student riots indicate that a change in student status occurred as the end result of a consequential student sports competition such as games that involved university sports teams either vying for a championship title or a game that involved a detested rival. It is assumed that students experience a real or perceived change in student honor when their university wins or loses an important athletic event (i.e. championship game or game against an intense rival). This assumption is based on the premise that a winning school will experience an enhanced degree of honor (e.g., esteem, renown, adoration, respect, prestige) if they win a sports championship title. In contrast, a losing university is assumed to undergo a diminished degree of honor with the loss of an important sporting event. The data indicates that out of the 30 college riots that began immediately following a college athletic event, 93% occurred at the end of a championship title game and 7% took place in the aftermath of a contest between fierce rivals.

In summary, the analysis of student riot data indicates that prior to each of the 106 events students reported that they had experienced a change in their status due to a real or perceived change in their lifestyle and/or honor. Changes in lifestyle were attributed to new

policies, procedures, ordinances, or laws that did not allow students to practice typical behavioral patterns, or to the ending of a significant sporting competition.

### *Trigger Event*

The examined textual data reveals that student riots erupt from two types of situations or conditions: (1) incidents that involve police action against the actors or (2) demonstrative activities that take place in the aftermath of meaningful sporting events. Notably, reports associated with 76 of the 106 riots indicate that the disorder began when police took action to curtail the festive activities of students who had gathered together during a party, festival, holiday celebration, dance, or at a bar.

Data on the remaining 30 student riots indicate that they arose from groups of students who had gathered within a short period following the conclusion of a significant sporting event (i.e. game involving a championship title or game between rivals). Lanter (2004) and Young (2002) had similar findings that showed students from multiple higher education institutions engaged in riotous actions in the aftermath of both victories and losses by their schools sports team. An example of a sport event trigger found in this study's data is exemplified by the following report that describes the onset of the 1996 Kentucky riot:

Celebrating the school's first NCAA basketball title in 18 years, Kentucky fans poured onto the streets, overturning a television station's vehicle, tossing people over their shoulders and climbing utility poles. Police estimated 10,000 people had crowded into the area north of the school's campus within minutes after Kentucky beat Syracuse 76-67 Monday night in the championship game at East Rutherford, N.J ("Kentucky Fans Go Wild Over NCAA title" 1996:1A).

A summary of the data suggests that each riot examined in this study was initialized by a specific trigger event that seemingly ignited the students to riotous behaviors. More specifically, two types of trigger events were reported in the data: (1) incidents in which police intervened in either students' festive activities or (2) celebratory behaviors at the end of important collegiate sporting competitions. In addition, each of the 106 identified trigger events

were reported as taking place in one of three types of geographic locations: (1) areas composed of dense student housing, (2) places where students typically gather to socialize (e.g., local bars, specific parking lots, certain street corners) or (3) regions within or outside of event facilities that host student functions (e.g., dances) or athletic events.

Seventy-three of the 106 trigger incidents examined in this study were reported as taking place in dense student housing areas that were located near, or on, university campuses. This point is exemplified in the following report from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that describes where the 2008 Pittsburgh State University riot occurred: “[T]he disturbance took place in an area known as ‘Beaver Canyon,’ a stretch near Beaver Avenue and Locust Lane that has five student high-rise apartment buildings” (Chute 2008:A10).

In addition to being high-density student housing tracts, many of the riot areas were also identified as being very distinctive. For example, a number of the trigger locations had specific titles or reputations that identified them as significantly unique from other locales. For example, seven of the student riots were described as taking place on streets that contained a number of fraternity houses. Descriptions that were used in the reports to describe the areas include, “fraternity row” (Horiuchi 1996:1C), “a street populated with Greek houses” (Sanchez 1998:1B), “West Cross Street where the fraternities are located” (Vernon-Chesley and Jeffrey 1991:1B), and “the narrow streets near the campus neighborhood known as *Greektown*” (Young 1990:1A).

Other examples of reported unique dense student housing locations that gave rise to some of the student events include, “The Ghetto” where the 1992 and 1993 University of Dayton riots occurred (Reed 1993:1A) and “The Hill,” the area of Boulder where multiple University of Colorado riots took place between 1997 and 2004. A further example of riot areas comes from Roger Ryan, Vice-President of Administrative Services for the University of Akron, in

his description of the student residence area where the 1990, 1994 and 1996 University of Akron riots erupted:

5,000 students call the neighborhoods south and east of the University of Akron home and housing along Kathryn Place is considered the worst of the off-campus housing (qtd. in Funk 1990:9A).

A last example of unique trigger areas comes from a report in the *Los Angeles Times* that describes and names the area where the 1990 California State University at Chico riot occurred:

[O]utside [the] Sierra West private apartment complex that caters to university students and is known by local residents as *The Zoo* because of the many parties held there (Murphy 1990:31A).

In addition to some riot areas having distinctive titles, a number also had unusual geographic configurations. For example, the area where the 1998 Saint Mary's College riot took place is described in one report as "a football-sized green surrounded by college dorms called *the Townhouses*" (Mangaliman 1998:6B). Moreover, "Village Lane," the location where the 2000 James Madison University (JMU) riot took place, was described as being a "dead-end street lined with townhouses occupied primarily by JMU [students]" (Trice 2000:1A).

The dense student residential locations where many of the riots broke out were further described in reports as having troubled or violent histories. For example, Patrol Commander Steve Gammill in a *Columbus Dispatch* report explains that the site of the 1996 Ohio State University (OSU) riot included an area composed of a number of apartment buildings that were located on side streets situated along the east of the OSU campus that had a difficult history:

This is the only area where that happens [party-goers throw rocks, bottles, bricks at cops]. It was the same as after the Notre Dame (football) game - the same pattern that forces us to keep going back to the area. There were a lot of crowds, but they really didn't cause us a problem. Ninety-eight percent of our problems were on E. 12th Avenue (qtd. in Thomas and Albrecht 1996:2C).

The point is further illustrated by two reporters from *The Capital Times Wisconsin State Journal* that describes the history of the riot area where the 1996 University of Wisconsin riot erupted:

In 1969 [student residents were] denied a block party permit, Mifflin residents gathered anyway and were met by police in riot gear who dispersed the crowd with clubs and tear gas. Three days of riots in the 400 and 500 blocks of Mifflin Street left 70 injured (Hamlin and LiCari 1997:3A).

In summary, 69% of the student riot epicenters were located in areas where large numbers of students reside. Many of these areas have significant names, physical features, and histories that make them unique and well known to students, authorities and community members.

Seventeen of the 106 student riots were characterized in the data as erupting in neighborhoods or areas where students frequently gather or socialize. These types of student locations include areas that have a number of student-frequented local bars and/or specific parking lots or street corners known as student gathering points. An example of this type of area is detailed in the following report that describes the area where three Southern Illinois University at Carbondale riots (i.e. October 1994, May 1999, and October 1996) took place, "on the stretch of Illinois Avenue known as *The Strip* that contains several off-campus bars" ("Campus Riots Mar Weekend" 1996:1). A further example comes from a report in the University of Connecticut newspaper that informs the reader that the center of the 1998 University of Connecticut riot was "Farmer Brown's parking lot, adjacent to X-lot where students frequently hang out" (Westervelt 1998:1).

In addition to trigger events occurring in dense housing areas and areas frequented by students, the data brought to light the fact that 16 of the student riots occurred in areas near event facilities. A report in the *Denver Post* on the 1999 Colorado State University (CSU) riot illustrates this fact:

Denver police tear-gassed hundreds of football fans at Mile High Stadium late Saturday as cups, bottles and other debris rained down on officers and deflated CU players trying to make their way off the field after a disappointing 41-14 loss to cross-state rival CSU (Dreyer 1999:1A).

In total, each identified riot in this study was reported as erupting in an area heavily populated by students (i.e. dense student housing tract, place where students gather or event facility). These findings are supported by studies that examined student disturbances (e.g., celebratory riots, party riots) which reported that they often occur in "neighborhoods that are adjacent to university and college campuses" (Buettner 2004; Ruddell et al. 2005), student frequented bars (Buettner 2004), sports facilities (Blevins 1999; Buettner 2004; Young 2002) and campus event centers (Fisher 1991; Harris 1997; Rudd 1990).

### *Riot*

The student riots analyzed in this study were consistently reported as having similar temporal and behavioral patterns. With regard to the temporal aspects of the riots, the data revealed that each of the 106 riots experienced a similar pattern. Specifically, it was reported that within a few minutes of the initial trigger event student collective action began. During the evening the event dramatically escalated in terms of the number of participants, and by early morning the actors' actions reached peak intensity. Ninety percent of the campus riots were reported as beginning during nighttime hours and one 100% were reported as intensifying during the night and peaking between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m. These findings correspond with a University of New Hampshire (2003:1) student riot study that found celebratory riots and party riots seem to occur "very late at night" and extend "into the early morning hours."

With regard to the behavioral aspects of the student riots examined in this study, the data discloses that across all 106 different events actors engaged in similar actions. Initial riot actions in a 100% of the events included throwing objects (e.g., bottles, bricks, rocks, or other projectiles) at target group members (e.g., police) and the destruction of public and/or private

property. In 69 of the riots, it was also reported that actors had set bonfires in the street and/or set fires to dumpsters. An example of a report that describes the actions of actors comes from *The Boston Globe* which states that the 1997 University of New Hampshire riot involved students "throwing rocks and bottles at the police" (Kittredge 1997:1B). *The Seattle Times* offers a second example in a report that explains that the 1998 Washington State University riot initially concerned "[a]lcohol-fueled partygoers in Pullman throwing rocks and beer bottles at police in riot gear" (Hadley and Miletich 1998:1A).

Another behavioral pattern the data exposed was that each of the 106 events were comprised of both *active* participants and *passive* observers. This finding corresponds with the University of New Hampshire's (2003) celebratory riot study findings that indicate celebratory riots involve large crowds composed of both participants and "onlookers" (p. 1). This point is exemplified by a report analyzed in the current study that quotes Sergeant David Poppe, a member of the Eugene police department, as concerns passive actors involved in the 1997 University of Oregon riot:

When you've got perhaps 100 people who are just standing in the middle of the problem [riot], they become identified with the problem. And it's hard to separate who is doing what. How do you say 'Don't go to the riot'? In essence, it's a spectator sport. I don't know how we alter that (qtd. in Sowa 1997:1).

A third performance element unveiled by the analyzed data is that actors in all 106 student riots selectively chose their targets; they did not randomly target the people or things that were nearest or most accessible to them. Report after report states that certain types of individuals, businesses, and/ or items were targeted by the actors for assault or destruction. An example of selective targeting comes from the following statement made by Ames, Iowa, Police Captain Jim Robinson as he relates what occurred when students rioted after Iowa State University beat UCLA in the later rounds of the NCAA championship football tournament:

The crowd began to gather about 11:15 p.m., damaged vehicles and tore down some light poles. [The] estimated 3,000, [then] paraded to the home of university president Martin Jischke and then to the Cyclones' football stadium. ("NCAA Notebook NCAA Wins Spark Campus Violence" 2000:9D).

The *Akron Beacon* offers a further report that illustrates how rioters engaged in intentional targeting during the 1996 University of Akron riot:

There were jagged shards of glass where the windows used to be in Adam Kaschalk's house. Brian O'Neill's furniture was a pile of ashes and charred wood in the street. Dave Del Rosa nursed a black eye. They were three of the people who were victimized by a horde of drunken rioters who set fires, and attacked anyone who tried to put out the flames (Hoiles 1996:1A).

These examples express what the riot data displays, that the rioters selectively targeted specific individuals, properties and items for combat and/or destruction. As such, these findings may indicate that since the targets were intentionally chosen by the students, they had some significance for the participant actors.

### *Response*

The student riot data revealed that immediately following each of the 106 student riots experienced some type of response by local community members, city leaders, ranking police officers, institutional authorities, and/or students (i.e. actors and non-actors). Response measures ranged in form and included both informal actions (e.g., admonishments, op-ed statements, student justifications) and official proceedings (e.g., community meetings, creation of task force, stricter law enforcement of alcohol use, criminal inquiries, enactment or change in alcohol policies or ordinances). Data indicated that formal actions took place after eighty-two of the events. A report in the *Detroit Free Press* illustrates this point in its description of actions taken in the aftermath of the Central Michigan University (CMU) riot that erupted at the end of an annual rival football game:

A task force of city and university representatives and students will explore possible solutions [to the riot], including: canceling the CMU-Western Michigan

University football game; limiting the number of out-of-town guests in university housing, increasing the police force and limiting liquor sales (Stewart 1991:3A).

A second example of formal riot responses comes from the *Emerald Oregon Daily* that reported as a response to the October 4 and October 31 riots that took place near the University of Oregon campus, "Eugene police intend to step up enforcement" of underage drinking laws (Sowa 1997:2A). A third example of formal riot responses comes from two Denver newspapers that describe the actions taken in the aftermath of several student riots that erupted near the University of Colorado (CU) campus:

CU recently announced a three-strikes policy carrying a one-semester suspension for violations of federal law and university regulations on drug and alcohol use, even seeming trifling ones ("Partying Too Hearty" 2000:60A).

An alcohol ban in the stadium was announced three weeks ago by police and university officials after months of meetings (Curtin 2000:1A).

An additional formal response example comes from a report in the *Syracuse Herald Journal* that describes the actions taken by Syracuse Mayor Roy Bernardi in reaction to the 1999 Syracuse University riot including "a temporary ban on all city-issued permits for house parties" that would remain in effect until the last day of the university's 1999 spring semester (qtd. in Weibezahl, Gleaves-Hirsch and Mercurief 1999:1B). A last example is found in a report from the *Detroit Free Press* in a quote by Kathleen Tinney, a spokesperson for Eastern Michigan University (EMC) about what actions the school will take in response to the 1991 EMC riot. "Bette White, the Dean of Student Services, will begin an investigation" into the riot that erupted near EMC's fraternities, and "at week's end, White is to issue a report that could recommend sanctions against the fraternities" (qtd. in Vernon-Chesley and Jeffrey 1991:1B).

Data indicates that twenty-four student riots were only followed by non-formal responses most typically in the form of statements and opinion pieces that either justified or

admonished student actions. Following is an example of a non-formal response by a parent of a Miami of Ohio student:

Tom Hammar, a parent of a student who got stuck in the middle of the Friday disturbance and was pepper sprayed stated that kids are going to be kids. He further said that the problem is that alcohol is doing the speaking, and he didn't think the kids would have done those things if they weren't out partying (Ward and Beyerlein 1998:1B).

In summary, the riot data indicates that each event analyzed in this study was met with a response in the form of an official statement, public opinion, community reaction, policy change, and/or the enactment of new local or state law. These findings correspond with similar riot study findings that examined mixed-issue student riots and college town disturbances and riots that indicate they received some type of official or non-official response (Buettner 2004; Ruddell et al. 2005).

#### *Group Relations, Restored or Strained*

Examination of the riot data disclosed that succeeding each the 106 student riots, the relationship between actor group members (i.e. students) and non-actor group members (e.g., college/university authorities, police, city officials, local community members) either returned to pre-riot states of being or became eminently more strained. The following statement by a St. Mary's College junior Bryant Porter, quoted in the *Washington Post*, exemplifies how student and other group relations were restored after a week following the 1998 St. Mary's College riot:

This party tonight brings us back together and lets the community know the impression that they were given last Saturday is not what it appears to be (qtd. in Mangaliman 1998:M3).

In contrast to the above statement indicating a restoration of group relations, the following statement made by David C. Stacy, President of the University of Wisconsin (UW) Student Government, illustrates how responses by the Oshkosh community following the 1995 UW riot led to the further estrangement between students and police:

Police raids are not going to change the attitudes of 19- and 20-year-olds, and it will not stop them from drinking. It will simply increase student anger and frustration ("Lower Drinking Age Knocked, Oshkosh Riot Hurt Cause" 1995:3A).

A second example of strained relations comes from a report in the *Oregon Voice* that describes group relations in the University of Oregon community a year after the second of two consecutive University of Oregon student riots:

A year has passed since what University [of Oregon] President Dave Frohnmayer called 'the beer riots,' and there have been few signs of a resolution ...While there is nothing new about the rocky relationship between young people and figures of authority, this conflict seems to have taken on new dimensions (Wyer 1998:1).

### *Multiple Events*

In addition, analysis of the student riot data further disclosed the fact that riots often had repeat events; many university campuses and communities that encountered a student riot experienced repeat episodes of rioting often in the same location as the initial event. Of the 52 campus communities that witnessed a student riot between 1990 and 2009, 20 experienced repeat events. (See Appendix 1 for the location of the university riot communities and for the number of events each locale experienced.)

The data indicates that only 30% of the examined riots took place in a geographic location that experienced only a single event. In contrast, the data discloses that 70% of student riots occurred in the same general area of previous riot events. Thirteen of the 52 examined student riot areas had observed two-three incidents. Moreover, six student riot settings were reported to have more than four occurrences of rioting. Of these six areas, two witnessed more than eight incidents of student rioting.

An example of multiple riots occurring on a campus comes from a report in *The Columbus Dispatch* that describes a 1996 Ohio State University (OSU) riot that followed four previous OSU events:

Police arrested seven people early Sunday when alcohol-fueled parties...turned violent after the OSU football team's win over Notre Dame. Revelers threw beer bottles, tipped over and smashed cars, and torched furniture in the street. It was the fifth time since November 1994 that police sent officers in riot gear to squelch trouble on campus (LaLonde and Caruso 1996:1A).

A second example of multiple riots is described in the *Detroit Free Press* that states the riot that occurred "after CMU's [Central Michigan University's] 27-17 football victory over Western Michigan, marked the third year of street rioting related to the rivalry" (Bell, Wilson and Vernon-Chesley 1991:1A). A last example of multiple student riots in the same locale comes from the *Rocky Mountain News* that details three different CU events that occurred in an area that borders the west end of the campus known as *The Hill*:

Aug. 27, 2000 - Boulder police in riot gear used tear gas to scatter a crowd of up to 1,000 rock- and bottle-throwing young people who set bonfires and broke car windows. One was arrested and at least one officer was injured. An estimated \$5,000 to \$8,000 damage was done in the neighborhood west of the University of Colorado campus [known as the Hill] (McCullen 2000:4A).

Oct. 30, 1999 - Rioters overturned two cars, ignited bonfires and threw rocks and bricks at officers on a University Hill street hours after CU upset Oklahoma University 38-24 at home. Five people were arrested. One officer was seriously injured and several others sustained minor injuries (McCullen 2000:4A).

May 3-5, 1997 - A huge riot erupted on University Hill when hundreds of college students and other revelers set bonfires and pelted officers with rocks and bricks. Police arrested 35 people. Several officers and dozens of others were injured. The riots caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in property damage and cost the city more than \$400,000 (McCullen 2000:4A)

In summary, this study's findings suggest that riots often reoccur in the same general geographic locations. This echoes the observations made by the Ohio State University's (OSUs) Task Force on Preventing Celebratory Riots (2003) that found evidence that multiple riots had occurred in an area near OSU. The Task Force, which examined campus/community disturbances not associated with protests, produced a matrix that delineated eight violent

“celebratory disturbances that occurred between the years of 1996 and 2002, in the neighborhoods east of High Street” in Columbus, Ohio (Ohio State University Task Force on Preventing Celebratory Riots 2003:20). The report further emphasizes the point that riots often occur in a specific location by pointing out that 10 additional non-violent incidents occurred in the same neighborhood east of High Street during the stated time period.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there are eight key findings from this study. The first indicates that students associated with each of the 106 examined riots perceived a change in their lifestyle and/or honor (e.g., prestige, respect, esteem) prior to the destructive student event. This suggests that student actors riot not so much to bring about social change, but rather to express their reaction to a social status change. Thus, contemporary student riots may not be issueless riots as assumed by many researchers. Rather, they may be issue driven in terms of actors publicly expressing that they are unhappy/happy about actions that led to a change in their social status and as such the lifestyle and prestige associated with that societal standing.

Second, the data reveals that each of the 106 riots was triggered by a specific incident that initiated the onset of student riotous actions (i.e. throwing objects, setting fires). Third, each examined riot was reported as taking place in an area where students live, gather or attend an event. Fourth, the data in this study expose facts that suggest student riots followed a similar temporal pattern. All 106 examined events took place at night and reached their peak intensity in the late nighttime hours, or the very early hours of the morning.

Fifth, the data offers evidence that suggests students’ initial riot behaviors involve the throwing of objects at target group members (e.g., police). Additionally, actors in student riots often engage in the setting of fires either in streets or in dumpsters. Sixth, the study found that each campus riot was reported as being followed by some type of formal and/or informal

response by members or authorities of the riot community and/or campus. Additionally the data indicates that at the conclusion of each of the student riots group relations between students and non-student groups were either: (1) restored to pre-riot conditions or (2) adversely strained. Last, the riot data suggests that student riots often reoccur in communities that have experienced one or more previous events, often in the same general location

The consistency of the findings across all 106 events examined in this study may suggest that contemporary student riots follow a similar process that begins after students perceive a change in their status. The riot is initiated by a trigger event which swells into a riot and is then followed by some type of response. The entire riot process appears to end with either a strain or restoration of student-community group relations. This similar process across events suggests that student riots may in fact follow a student riot *script*. It has a certain number of acts that occur in a particular sequence, forges the same *characters* (e.g., students and police) and includes the same situations and actions (e.g., throwing objects, setting fires); the actors adhere to an overall established riot composition, albeit they add their own vigor and style.

Future research is needed to determine if student riots are in fact purposeful and manifest in analogous ways. Moreover, additional studies are necessary to determine if student riots arise from conditions of student status change that affect students' lifestyle and/or honor. If status change is indeed a significant riot causal factor, this fact can be used to better predict when riots are more likely to arise and where they are likely to occur. In addition, a better understanding about the areas where riots arise and often reoccur can assist university, police, and community authorities to focus on preventative riot measures and actions in the specific locations that are highly prone to these types of events. Furthermore, knowledge about riot places can assist universities and communities in either eliminating the types of areas that seem

to breed riots or in modifying riot areas in ways that act to decrease physical or geographical aspects that isolate student populations from other community populations.

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**Appendix 1** Riot Locations and Number of Events

