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ABSTRACT

The reactions of constituencies of students, administrators, faculty, and community members to student uprisings on the campus of Michigan State University in 1999 were studied. Interviews with 20 people, representing students, administrators, and community members, explored the events leading up to the disturbance of March 27, 1999, following a basketball defeat. Property damage, police action, and extensive media coverage resulted from the disturbance. Data were collected a year after the event. Participants generally characterized the disturbance as a "riot," a "revolution," or a "wild party." There was no evidence that a given constituency produced the same interpretation of the event, and there was fluidity among the broadly outlined categories. However, people not directly involved in the disturbance were more likely to call it a riot. The liberal leaning faculty and some students thought that revolution was a more apt phrase. A recurrent theme was that the university is lacking in traditions that students can observe each year and that the disturbance represented an attempt to create tradition by some students. The issue of alcohol consumption appeared to be at the center of the argument about tradition. The findings do demonstrate that there is more than one way to interpret what is happening on campuses and that students want the right to voice their concerns. (Contains 12 references.) (SLD)

Student Uprisings at Michigan State University: Riot or Revolution?

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Introduction

See me in the street. I'm partying, dancing, jumping, gesturing, threatening.
Hear me in the street. I'm laughing, shouting, cheering, screaming, cursing.
In this street I feel so jubilant, excited, angry, frustrated, defiant.
How do I tell you what is happening in the street?

Between 1997 and 1999, a series of uprisings occurred on the campus of Michigan State University (MSU) and in the streets of the surrounding community of East Lansing involving groups 500 to 10,000 strong. The result of these events was damage to property, intervention by police and wide media coverage. With the preceding in mind, we wanted to know how different constituencies of students, administrators, faculty and community members make sense of this phenomenon. Were the events at MSU part of a trend showing increased student activism on campus (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Rhoads, 1998) or were they merely riots?

The events at Michigan State University were not isolated, but were set against a national backdrop of student uprisings. In fact, student uprisings on college campuses have increased over the past several years (Levine & Cureton, 1998). At the end of the spring semester of 1998 alone, there were six major clashes between students and police. In what was called the "Right to Party" movement, students were "demanding to be permitted to drink even though most of them are not of legal age" (1998b,p. A46). In addition to a student/police altercation at Michigan State University, labeled the "Munn Field incident," student uprisings occurred at the University of Connecticut, at Washington State University, at Plymouth State College, at Pennsylvania State University, at the University of Tennessee at Martin, and at Ohio University. The uprising at Ohio University was the second consecutive year that students rioted due to the change in day

light savings time when they lost an hour of drinking time (1998a). This scale of student uprising had not been seen since the Vietnam War protests of a generation ago (Levine & Cureton, 1998).

Student movement literature informs this study, while the framework of social construction provides a theoretical structure. As researchers of this phenomenon, it was critical for us to listen to a variety of voices and hear how individuals described the various events Michigan State University. Discovering how each group made meaning of the incident aided in determining how to categorize the event. Through language, each group of participants conveyed their classification of the event. Some considered the night of March 29 1999 a riot, others considered it a revolution, while a third group thought it was a wild party.

The results of this investigation will add knowledge to how campus members make meaning of student uprisings and provide data to determine if the uprisings are viewed as a student movement or a riot. This insight could provide applicable direction to campuses and communities in preparing for the future.

Background

As the last fires smoldered and business owners swept up broken glass, dumbfounded police, East Lansing residents, Michigan State University (MSU) students and administrators puzzled over the events of Saturday, September 7, 1997. The events of that night would become all too familiar over the next few years. This paper explores student unrest on the MSU campus over the last three years, with particular attention on the final uprising of March 27, 1999.

On the evening of September 7, 1997 after a MSU football game, 400-500 students gathered on Gunson Street where a bonfire burnt out of control. The participants were throwing beer bottles on the streets, furniture was set on fire and numerous men and women were flashing

body parts. According to a biological science sophomore, “It was total anarchy” (Brunt, 1997, p. A1). Police were called in around 1:45 a.m. to break up the uprising, but the fracas continued out of control (Brunt, 1997). The participants were chanting, “Fuck the cops!” and throwing beer bottles at the police as they tried to break up the event.

Many have speculated that the uprising “... was aimed at local law enforcement agencies for enforcing tougher laws designed to cut down on alcohol use and house parties” (Brunt, 1997, p. A1). According to a MSU packaging senior and Gunson Street resident, “East Lansing continually takes away students’ rights to celebrate and party, it’s just not fair” (Brunt, 1997, A1). When the fire was extinguished and the beer bottles cleaned up, five individuals were charged for their roles in the event and at least 50 tickets issued to Gunson Street residents for violations relating to house parties.

The Gunson Street fracas raised concern with MSU administrators about alcohol consumption among students. In a continued effort to control alcohol abuse on campus, MSU officials announced on April 22, 1998 that Munn Field would become an alcohol free tailgating location starting in the 1998-1999 football season. For years, Munn Field was a popular tailgate location for students and alumni. Students described the parties on Munn Field as a tradition at MSU. The field sits next to the stadium and was a haven for binge drinking on game Saturdays. The alcohol ban was preceded by a furniture and keg ban during the 1997-1998 season (Woodhams, 1998).

Students were incensed when the decision became public. The process of banning alcohol on Munn Field was not a decision in which MSU students felt they were involved. While four

student groups were invited to the annual meeting of police and university administrators to discuss the ban, only one group sent a representative (Lively, 1998).

On Thursday, April 30th, Adam Herringa and Deborah Stoddard, both MSU students, sent an e-mail to students inviting them to Munn Field on Friday, May 1, 1998 to conduct a protest. When the students arrived at Munn Field, yellow police tape and a ring of MSU police blocking off the field greeted them. Student government officers were conducting interviews with the local media when students stormed and filled the field. Soon afterwards a student chant roused the crowd to march to the President's house. When the crowd discovered the President was out of town, they headed toward downtown East Lansing. Upon reaching downtown, the peaceful protest turned violent and ugly. Police started using tear gas on the crowd, the first time East Lansing officers had thrown tear gas in twenty years. After the tear gas settled and students went home, 17 students were arrested for binge drinking (Delgado, 1998) and relations between students and police and between students and administrators was greatly damaged (Woodhams, 1998). As a result of the Munn Field uprising, President McPherson formed an Alcohol Task force to study alcohol policy on the MSU campus.

Although it began as a celebration, student's pent-up frustrations burst forth again in March 1999 when MSU defeated the University of Kentucky to advance to the final four in the men's NCAA basketball tournament. About 1,000 students began a march on the MSU campus, which ended at a bonfire at the Cedar Village Apartment complex on the East side of campus. The end result was the arrest of two students and minor damages in some campus residence halls (Sell, 1999). Police used pepper spray on the crowd when students attempted to extinguish the fire and participants kept starting new fires in different locations. The event finally broke up

around 2:00 a.m. While the incident was not as destructive as the Gunson Street event of the previous fall or the Munn Field uprising of the previous spring, it was a source of concern for local police and MSU officials (Sell, 1999).

The concern on the part of police and administrators was not unfounded as seen when the dust settled the following weekend of March 28, 1999. The campus community erupted when MSU lost to Duke University in the NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four. Beginning shortly after 10 p.m. on Saturday, March 27, 1999 approximately 10,000 people began to gather on and around the MSU campus. The damage tally estimates totaled \$500,000 by night's end. A total of 61 separate fires burned that night, with four major fires serving as focal points on campus and on the nearby streets of East Lansing. Many businesses' windows were broken and stores looted in the downtown area, campus building windows were broken, trees uprooted, traffic signs destroyed and lampposts vandalized. A total of seven cars, including a police cruiser, burned that night. Participants pelted police with frozen beer cans and ignored all commands to disperse. The crowd was completely out of control for the four and half-hours between 10:30 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. Police threw the last tear gas at 6:00 a.m. An all out campaign by police and MSU administration resulted in the prosecution of a total of 132 individuals, with 71 MSU students in this number.

After the last student uprising, a community relation's coalition formed bringing together members from the campus, area residents and city officials to dialogue on ways to improve relationships. Students also reacted by conducting an anti-riot march and selling anti-riot t-shirts to raise money to pay the city for damages. Ladies First, a female singing group on campus

performed a parody to the song “Catch Us if You Can,” which mocked the students who were acting out in the streets.

Members of the Michigan State community planned and waited with anticipation as the 2000 NCAA basketball finals approached. A sigh of relief greeted the peaceful night of celebration after MSU’s victory over Florida State.

Literature Overview

Social movements and the literature associated with these movements during the last century have been plentiful. These movements have various titles. For the purposes of this research, a student movement is defined as one where student activists express their beliefs within a cause. For example, society has witnessed “civil rights” marches, “women’s liberation” rallies, “anti-war” protests, “animal rights” activism, “environmental protection” campaigns and legislation. There have been groups speaking out for the “right to life” and others demanding the “right to die.”

A working definition of social movements by Meyer and Tarrow describes movements as “collective challenges to existing arrangements of power and distribution by people with common purposes and solidarity, in sustained interaction with elite’s, opponents, and authorities” (Meyer, 1998, p. 4). Although frequently met with resistance when occurring, a social movement is an historical way of using a collective voice.

Student movements often find themselves situated in the larger context of social movements. Students have participated in protests on various political issues such as resistance to government, university policy, ideologies, and human rights injustices. While younger people are

more willing to protest than older ones (Dalton, 1996), Crozat (1998) found that age was not as significant in 1990 compared to 1974 in terms of whether a person accepts protest. In describing historical student movements, Laqueur reflected that “youth movements have always been extreme, emotional, enthusiastic; they have never been moderate or rational” (p. 15). Characteristics of an activist include someone who “feels that some injustice has been done and attempts to ‘take a stand,’ ‘demonstrate’ or in some fashion express his [sic] convictions” (Keniston, 1971, p. 46).

Student movement on college campuses has a long history waxing and waning between apathy and activism. “Apathy is alive and well, but there is nonetheless evidence that student protest and a commitment to campus and social change has once again surfaced, at least among a significant body of students” (Rhoads, 1998). Within student culture in educational organizations, there exists “a complex of dominant and subordinate cultures, wherein different groups struggle to gain voice so as to define and legitimate their own interests and realities” (Tierney, 1991, p. 42). Rhoads (1998), notes that the message students are sending is that the institutions supposedly structured to serve a democratic society are failing.

Meyer and Tarrow (1998) argue that a wider variety of individuals are involved in protests today, but the form of protests is changing and becoming more institutionalized and professionalized—relying less on contentious forms of protest. This change in movement structure alters the movement’s historical modes of attracting members and its use of power to disrupt and create uncertainty. However, the institutionalization of protests has not increased their acceptance by the public (Crozat, 1998).

While only a minority of American students have been active in student movements (Altbach, 1997), the causes they represent are real for the larger student body. Students face academic pressures, which can cause low levels of participation in movements. “Obtaining an undergraduate degree can easily leave a student heavily in debt, forcing choices designated to satisfy their creditors rather than their ideals, and increasing the pressure to do well academically” (Vallela, 1988, p. 6). Also at issue in limiting student activism is fear of reprisal through suspension, expulsion or criminal charges.

A review of the literature on student unrest by Foleno (1992) outlined three broad categories of cause: institutional causes, societal causes and socialization causes. Institutional causes dealt with issues of structure within institutions of higher education. Societal causes emanated from issues in a larger social context than the campus environment. Socialization causes pertained to concepts of interactions, both within the social system of the college and with voluntary associations.

Current research on the increase in student activism on college campuses focuses on multiculturalism as a major area of activity (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Rhoads (1998) used a case study approach to illustrate the increased activism via identity politics during the 1990s to argue that while specific campuses saw activity revolving around gender, race or sexual identity issues, there was broader multicultural support. At issue is how to deal with student unrest on campuses by either responding to the symptoms of the unrest or investigating systemic causes for the unrest (Rhoads, 1998).

Against the student movement backdrop is the role of student culture. Campuses have inherent cultures that exist within the confines of the ivory towers and students try to define and

place themselves within the traditions of a campus (Toma & Kezar, 1999). Campus administration and students together create student culture on campuses. Astin's research concluded that peer influence was found to be the "single most potent influence" on student behavior during the undergraduate years (1993, p. 398). When students feel that the university is not supporting what they believe to be part of being a college student or rite of passage they challenge the system (Becker, 1970). Toma and Kezar (1999) posit that students are trying to broaden their ideals and get their voices heard in various avenues on campuses.

Moffatt notes that "college [is] about being on your own, about autonomy, about freedom from the authority of adults" (1989, p. 28). While academics are an important part of the college experience, extracurricular activities are also important. A popular student activity is partying. While research shows that college students identify drinking as the current number one fun activity, the same as 1979, the difference is the increase in binge drinking (Levine, 1999). What has also changed since 1979 is how institutions view campus drinking. "Over the years colleges tended to wink at the alcohol policies, and then they started enforcing and changing policies without involving students in the decisions" (Reisberg, May 15, 1998, p. A48). This trend applies to the situation at Michigan State University.

Theoretical Framework

As a phenomenological study, the intent of this research was to focus on the phenomenon of student uprisings at Michigan State University to "understand the meaning of experiences of individuals about this phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 38). Our orientating framework was that of social construction. "The American social psychologist, W.I. Thomas once observed that if

people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Morgan, 1997, p. 179). We drew from this concept when we interviewed members of the four constituencies to obtain an understanding of their perspectives of the student uprisings.

Our study was informed by the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) who argued that reality is socially constructed. How individuals develop their knowledge is rooted in their social location and context at the moment. Hence, there are multiple realities at any given time. Social interactions with others have immediate impact on an individual’s development of knowledge and how they construct reality, particularly in close relationships. Face-to-face encounters provide direct interaction and feedback as opposed to relationships further removed. In our study, this means that students interacting daily with classmates are impacted to a greater extent by these relationships than by the more distant relationship they have with the administration or community members. Faculty also hold a strong position due to their frequent interactions with students.

Language and communication play an important role in how reality is constructed, since language is the “prime site of construction of the person” (Burr, 1995, p. 39). Neumann (1995), in her case study of two campuses, illustrates how leaders can use language and communication to create a vision of reality for their campus community. What people hear and how they hear it impacts how they synthesize this information when constructing their picture of reality. This component of social constructivism plays an integral part in reviewing the incidents on the MSU campus. Communication occurs on multiple levels between peers, with administrators and students, in and out of class with faculty, and students with community members.

Another point that Berger and Luckmann make is that “in resocialization the past is reinterpreted to conform to the present reality, with the tendency to retroject into the past various

elements that were subjectively unavailable at the time” (1966, p. 149). Since the interviews for this study were conducted one year after the last student uprising and two and one-half years after the Gunson Street incident, resocialization is an important consideration. In addition, there was active intervention by the administration and campus community to prevent an uprising by students from occurring again this year. Therefore, the active reconstruction of the current environment during the interview process may have influenced the way in which those interviewed remembered previous student uprisings.

A criticism of the use of social constructivism is that it “denies or minimizes the effect of individual talent and rejects the possibility of personal transcendence of group identity” (Goodheart, 1995, p. 323). Certainly when we speak of any of the constituencies interviewed, there were members of the group that did not hold the opinions that those interviewed professed. Burr argues, however, that while it is necessary to acknowledge individual voices, deconstructing categories to include every marginal voice risks losing a collective base from which to proceed (Burr, 1998). So, while we acknowledge that the findings we uncovered during research may not represent every voice, we used the collective voice of the administration, faculty, community and students to proceed in forming generalities for our discussion.

Methodology

To investigate the phenomenon of student uprisings at Michigan State University the authors chose to investigate events leading up to the March 27, 1999 incident that occurred after MSU’s loss to Duke University in the final four NCAA tournament. The events included the Gunson Street incident (September 6, 1997), the announcement of the decision to ban alcohol on Munn Field (April 22, 1998), the Munn Field protest (May 1, 1998), the Kentucky-MSU post-

game fires (March 21, 1999) and the final student uprising after the MSU-Duke game (March 27, 1999). The authors identified four constituencies to study—faculty, students, administrators, and community members. These groups represented the primary participants in the events and subsequent aftermath.

Data Collection

Data for the research was obtained from personal interviews, either face-to-face or via telephone depending on the location of the subject. Interviews, with a formal interview protocol, were conducted either on campus, in community representative's offices or at neutral off site locations such as coffee shops. The total interviews included twenty (20) people. All interviews were tape recorded with participant consent. Document analysis included a review of the MSU college web site, archived campus newspapers, *Chronicle of Higher Education* news reports, published campus reports and videotapes of the March 27, 1999 uprising. Data collection occurred during February and March 2000, one year after the last student incident. The researchers used pseudonyms for administrators, faculty, students and community members participating in this study.

Purposeful sampling identified the subjects to interview. All of the participants experienced the MSU-Duke uprising, but in the case of some students and community members, not all necessarily experience the incidents of Gunson Street, Munn Field or the event after the Kentucky-MSU game. Triangulation of respondent information compared published reports of each event and news accounts to determine accuracy. The researchers kept tapes and transcribed interviews in locked cabinets to protect confidentiality of the participants.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were read and re-read, obtaining a sense of overall themes. We looked at the data and identified statements, which indicated how the participants experienced the student uprisings. Thematic grouping put various statements in separate categories. Patterns and categories were identified and noted using what Marshall & Rossman referred to as “reduction” and “interpretation” (Creswell, 1994, p. 154). Patterns and themes identified the basic codes during the first stage of analysis.

In analyzing our data it was important for the authors to bracket their prejudices. “The researcher also sets aside all prejudgment, bracketing his or her experiences...and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p.52). One component that framed our positions was the time when we were college students and how this recalled the college environment for us, as we knew it. The three authors completed their undergraduate work in 1972, 1982 and 1994. This places each author in a very different culture and atmosphere during her college years on campus. In addition, one author has children of college age, another has younger children and the third is expecting her first child.

Another factor that impacted our views was our current employment positions. In addition to graduate work, we hold positions in administration, student advisement and as a research assistant, either at MSU or at a local college. These factors all shape our location in how we approached the social construction of the uprisings by others and are acknowledged where appropriate.

After identifying the basic themes from the interviews, we read the transcripts to discover how those interviewed described each identified area. Here we pulled verbatim descriptors from

the transcripts. Viewing these statements we sought to discover the meaning and perspective that each of the constituencies infused in their understanding of the events. Our goal was to describe the essence of the experience for the participants. The findings section highlights how various groups described the student incident.

Findings

As the one-year anniversary of the last student uprising at Michigan State University approached, administrators, faculty, students and community members continued their struggle to construct meaning related to student movements on campus over the past three years. A review of newspaper articles, artifacts and interview discussions with 20 campus and community members revealed central themes around which each group has sought meaning and how they described the incidents. For the purposes of the findings section, a review of how those interviewed constructed the incident after the MSU-Duke game is highlighted.

The prevalent descriptors for the event were riot, wild party or revolution. While some of the language used by those interviewed did not specifically use the terms we have identified, the meaning of their interpretations fit within these labels. A person who described the event as a “good party gone bad” or a “mosh pit” fit the category of wild party. Whereas those describing the event as “uncontrolled” or “a looting free-for-all” were categorized under riot. Revolutionary verbiage included a description of a “protest” or “lack of voice”.

Conceptualized as a Riot

The night of March 27, 1999 witnessed students rioting in the streets. The perception of the student uprising as a riot according to President McPherson was clear in his public message the day after the event when he said, “Rioters are not welcome at MSU.” A forty-two (42) person

task force was put together to investigate the riot and had as its goal, according to a police informant, “To get the top 100 offenders.” A senior administrator pointed out, “There was a real strong desire to have those that participated be dealt with.”

Many thought that the riots and destruction after the Duke game were premeditated. However, there were some differing opinions. “The first indication that some students had planned to go too far came during the riot when police saw T-shirts made in advance with ‘Riot of ‘99’ logos.” Students hurled bottles at police officers, as well as frozen cans of beer. A police officer said, “They [students] were planning for a disturbance with frozen beer and students outfitted in gas masks.” A student questioned the reliability of this information when he sarcastically responded, “you know, we’re at college, we’d freeze water before beer cans. Who’s going to waste beer?”

Adding to the conception of the event as a riot was the level of destruction and larger crowds. Analysis after the riot found that 10 of the 14 public Michigan colleges and universities had student representation at the event making this an event beyond students at Michigan State University. Fires that night added to the sense of chaos. A total of 61 separate fires burned that night, with seven cars set on fire and burned. Looting of downtown stores began shortly after storefront windows were broken.

At issue during the evening of the Duke incident was the role of the media. Several interviewees cited occasions when they witnessed student behavior degenerating when the media was present. Students began “acting up for the cameras”. The perception was that the press fueled the event enormously. How the media portrayed the night’s activities swayed public perception of the event both locally and nationally. A student arrested the night of the Duke riots

said, “They [the media] victimized the university and the city immediately.” The media representation of the event was that of a riot.

The solution for those who viewed this event as a riot was to enact policy that allowed MSU administration and law enforcement personnel to act swiftly if another event of this nature occurred. One administrator commented that this would give public safety “more control over” events. In April 1999, the Board of Trustees passed a student conduct policy. An administrator pointed out “it was really an Anti-riot policy” that allowed for suspension of students for participating in off-campus infractions. On March 30, 2000, Governor Engler signed a college riot ban bill. “Under the bill, a person convicted of rioting, inciting to riot or committing civil disorder on the property of a university or community college, or within a half-mile of the university, could be banned from any university or community college property in the state” (2000).

Internal admission policy was also reviewed to determine if higher standards would solve the problem. A senior administrator pointed out that the grade point average of the offending students was not different from the general MSU student body. He went on to caution, “You know ... what ends up happening is that legislation or policy start being developed based on misperception.”

Conceptualized as a Wild Party

The night of March 27, 1999 witnessed students partying in the streets. The role of alcohol in the MSU student culture was a prevalent theme with those interviewed. A graduate resident advisor described it as “an *Animal House* mentality.” Students compared the night to “an event” like a concert, “spring break, in that anything goes,” and a “mosh pit.” A student affairs

advisor hypothesized that “There is a time and place for everything in college and many students come to school with an idea of doing certain things and partying is one of them.”

After the Munn Field incident, President McPherson formed an alcohol action team. Tickets issued to students for drinking violations and stops by police to perform Breathalyzer tests on students forms the basis for a negative relationship between students and police. From the perspective of students, they are being hassled unfairly by the police, while the police see this as complying with the tough Michigan State underage zero-tolerance drinking laws.

The day of the game between MSU and Duke saw high levels of alcohol consumption. Anecdotal information refers to all local stores selling out of popular brands of beer and having only empty selves. A junior explained, “The alcohol aisle at Meijer’s was cleared out... people bought up in preparation like for the party of their livers.” The bars were full during the day of the game, with many patrons drinking for upwards of eight hours prior to the uprising. When the students left the campus the night of the Duke incident, the many bar patrons as well as high school students from a local teenage hangout joined them on the streets of Grand River.

In describing the events after the Duke game, an administrator there that night reflected “Many of the folks appeared to be drunk, smelled of alcohol and the behavior was real physical.” MSU has a “party school” reputation, as evidenced by the university’s 1999 ranking of number three party school in the nation by *The 331 Best Colleges* (1999). According to one MSU professor, to live down a reputation like that takes many years and MSU is not doing a good job of “reconstructing its image.”

The solution to the constructed event as a party was punitive action for offenders. Increased patrol of student events for alcohol infractions was a result. At issue was the manner of

punishment. One student noted, “People were getting away with this, nobody got in troubled, we got tear gassed, big deal.” An academic administrator added, “Since they [police] did not arrest people at the time, there was no linking punishment with action. It was like a witch hunt afterwards.” When asked if an uprising would occur again this year, the general consensus was “no”, with the reason given that there was a fear of repercussions and the embarrassment the situation caused the university community.

Conceptualized as a Revolution

The night of March 27, 1999 witnessed students storming the streets. Students recounted they felt they were not heard. There was agreement among administrators, community members, faculty and students that the perceptions and realities regarding student voice added to campus tensions and the resulting student uprisings on campus. Contributing to this, an administrator pointed out, is that “the overall student body often feels that the student leaders are not representing their voices to the administration.” This coupled with the feeling that students at MSU “have no connection to the people making the decisions” left the campus rife with discontent.

Students reflecting on the incidents last year noted, with respect to the Munn Field decision, that “The way the university acted without talking to people and their hasty decision was uncalled for and that’s why people [were] frustrated.” Another graduate described it that “MSU is more reactive as opposed to proactive. Something happens, they crack down. Something happens, they crack down.” This same graduate went on to say, “They [administrators] were acting ‘in loco parentis’ or they thought they knew what was best for the students without

consulting them.” Students also noted how large size classes of 600-700 students add to the perception that “people feel like a number.”

A senior level administrator pointed out that “The student voice is always the same set of voices. We appeal to student leaders, but we don’t ever hear from the rank and file student.” The administration’s response after the Duke incident included the institution of “web-talk” where student questions and issues are addressed by the President via the Internet, administrators going to classrooms to talk with students, the administration suggesting that faculty discuss issues in the classroom and the President hosting forums in residential halls.

One student affairs administrator spoke to the point that “Animosity and tension between students and administrators, or their perception of administrators, is part of the college experience and part of what you would expect.” According to this person, a general anti-authoritarian stance is developmentally appropriate and always going to be present in the development process of college students.

Tensions on campus built up over time, as witnessed by the escalating numbers of people participating and the level of destruction and violence. Recounting the series of events, one academic administrator point to the Munn Field decision as a source of strain and said that “The rhetoric was inflammatory and insulting of students. It was a challenge to students and was a lid on a pressure cooker.” His assessment was that the incident after the Kentucky game had a political edge, “an in-your face attitude by students” that was fueled by resentment to the police presence. By the time of the Duke incident, mounted tensions overflowed as “students showed police that they couldn’t cow them and they would retake the streets to make a stand.” A police officer working the night of the Duke uprising commented that students “probably do not have a

voice on this campus, but the way they are acting out is wrong... There are right and wrong ways to be heard and they [students] are selecting the wrong way.”

The perspective of the student event as revolution requires changes within the campus community. These changes require the need to hear student voices. While administrators, faculty and community members described numerous formal opportunities for students to participate and speak both in campus organizations, community committees and open forums, a residential life staff member reported that “Most students don’t take the opportunity for voice, even though what you hear from students is that they don’t feel empowered.” A solution requires the opening of other avenues to hear rank and file student’s opinions. Discourse on campus needs to operate in two ways, a giving and taking of information.

Discussion

While definitive conclusions cannot be made to explain why 10,000 students at MSU took to the streets on March 27, 1999 and caused \$500,000 in damage to East Lansing and the campus, our observations and interviews recreate the evening from the perspective of the individuals interviewed. As we analyzed the data from the 20 interviews conducted, the reality the individuals created was unique and real to each informant. We did not find that a particular constituency produced the same interpretation and found fluidity between the categories themselves.

Because it was a year since the initial event, we are sensitive to the issue of resocialization and how time can heal wounds. One police officer interviewed said, “If you had interviewed me even nine months ago I would have said all involved should be thrown out of East Lansing and never allowed to return. Today, I would say let’s look at the severity of their involvement and

punish accordingly”. Time can also change how an individual makes meaning and sense out of an event (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As people talk to one another they recreate meaning based not only on their personal involvement but also based upon what others are saying about the event. People tend to recreate events hundreds of times and may never come to a clear understanding of the event (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Therefore in this study we are sensitive to the fact that many of the individuals interviewed are still making sense of this event and recreating for them what happened on the evening in question.

The terms riot, revolution and wild party were the concepts we used to describe what our informants were telling us. The definition of riot in Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (1977) is public violence or disorder. The term revolution is defined as the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977). A wild party connotes an unchecked social gathering. Some obvious overlap in these definitions is apparent.

The individuals interviewed came from four different constituencies, the faculty at MSU, administrators at MSU, students and graduates of MSU and community members from East Lansing. The administrators, community members and students not directly involved in the event used the term riot to construct the evening. The overtones in the interview were that of negative feelings toward the riot and that “it was an embarrassment to the university”. While this group did not see the riot affecting future recruiting of top students and money to the university from donors and alumni, they viewed it as a “black eye” on the university and worked hard to refocus the image of the campus.

The liberal leaning faculty and some students interviewed had tremendously different attitudes about the event one-year later as they described the incidents as part of a revolution. The

issue of voice and oppression seemed to surface in their reconstruction not only of the Duke incident, but also in the uprisings proceeding this final event. Bogad states that "If school is characterized as a prison for young people (with a few good wardens that make rehabilitation possible, though unlikely), then the world outside of the school becomes the antithetical prison break." (1998, p. 377). The student incidents were the result when the students broke out of the confines created by the administration. Students at MSU felt the administration was taking away student traditions that compose an important part of the culture at the college. With these traditions gone, students commentated that they thought of the uprisings as a boning experience.

A central theme among many students, some faculty and some administrators was that campuses should have traditions that students can observe each year. They felt that MSU does not have such observances and therefore the students are taking to the streets to create their own traditions and legacies. One faculty said that, "Unfortunately the students are not creating traditions that the administration is going to support, but rather fight against and put a stop to." Another faculty commented "When the university put an end to Cedar Fest in the spring [a festival in the Cedar Village Apartment Complex where thousands of students would gather to celebrate the completion of the academic year], the administration created more problems by not letting the students gather and celebrate the end of the year." The students also felt another tradition taken away from them were tailgate parties on Munn Field. The administrative reason behind this change in policy was based on issued of alcohol use.

The issue of alcohol consumption and how much drinking occurs on campus seems to be at the center of the argument about traditions. The students overwhelming said that alcohol is not the issue at hand, but rather the fact that the university is taking away everything that is traditional

on a college campus and making it an issue of alcohol use. In actuality the students we interviewed said alcohol is not the problem, but having a voice in making decisions on policy issues involving alcohol is. As one student noted, "We are not invited to participate in policy making sessions that affect us". One resident advisor agreed, "Alcohol is somewhat the issue, but more importantly is the fact that these students have no relationship with the administration and therefor when decisions are made and no input from the students was involved the students get upset and act out." Administrators and Student Affairs Professionals must deal with the effects of student drinking on campuses. Increased violence, campus vandalism, alcohol poisoning and sexual assaults are some of the results of campus alcohol abuse (Levine & Cureton, 1998). As such, administrations are changing policies regarding campus drinking and states are enacting tougher drinking ordinances.

Finally, college campuses themselves are undergoing profound change. The changes occurring are likened to the changes that occurred during the industrial revolution, this time the change is to an information age (Dolence & Norris, 1995). This coupled with the changes in the larger societal context makes the college students' environment very different. The historical cycles of change between periods of individual and community ascendancy are not applicable today, as discontinuity of the move to the information age and change dominates the life of college students (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Accordingly, more activism on campus today compared to student movement activity of the '60s takes place in different contexts.

Conclusion

Findings from this study demonstrate that individuals experiencing a single phenomenon create multiple realities. Individual meaning is affected by social groups and sharing of perceptions. Student activism on college campuses is on the rise. The sounds of new voices are increasing in proportion to the diversity in American culture and on campuses. The harmony and blending of all voices into one at the academy now are the sounds of dissonance. Pluralism and multiculturalism are clashing with the traditional authoritarian practices of the administration, which expects conformity. Schools must strive to meet the needs of individuals and develop ways to encourage diversity. Celebrating difference will create new harmonies.

Power struggles are erupting between authority (administration and police) and students. Polarization of sides increases when groups collide. Students react, administration cracks down, nails the perpetrators, students react and the cycle continues. Pent-up frustration, anger and rage occasionally surface in society and among students. At times these emotions are boiling over. Fearing a negative reputation tempers administration's decisions to crack down on dissenters. Student's fear of punishment restricts their disagreement with the system.

Students express they are without voice and power. Students feel like parents, administration, and authorities are controlling them. Paternalism forms the basis for decisions. Expectations placed upon students are high. Parents say, "we pay all this money, now you'd better do well. You will never get anywhere unless you get your degree." Administration says, "we need high numbers to pay the bills." Students feel like they are herded through the system and are expected to conform. Society and parents expect the university to control the students and frown upon student activism in the streets.

Student movements walk a fine line between oneness of purpose and loss of control. Alcohol as part of the student culture on campuses contributes to this loss of control. At the same time, alcohol and partying are part of the student tradition. Society is concerned with student deaths and injuries related to underage and binge drinking. Pressure on universities is growing with each related incident. Mixed messages are going out to students: act responsible, vote, conform to the university, be successful but we will tell you where, when and how much to drink. Although there was a peaceful demonstration this year and student uprisings have been tempered by control, there is the potential for future incidents on campus.

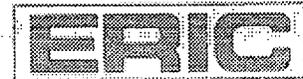
These findings illustrate to administrators responsible for developing policy that there is more than one interpretation of what is happening on college campuses. While we are not suggesting administrative policy, we do suggest administrators increase awareness of multiple voices and the building of venues, which allows the hearing of student voices. This does not guarantee specific rights to students, but allows them at the table to bring up their concerns.

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