“Fight for Your Right to Party”:
An Exploratory Study of Queen’s Homecoming Weekend
and the Phenomenon of Student Celebratory Riots

by

Emily Theriault

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Abstract

While college and university students have long been associated with newfound independence, alcohol and unrest, the phenomenon of celebratory rioting, which combines these key elements of student culture, is relatively new. While incidents have occurred since 1985, their recent escalation in size, frequency, and property damages continues to raise public concern in many college and university towns across North America. Research indicates that celebratory riots result from large non-protest related assemblies of mostly students where alcohol is consumed freely, participants spontaneously engage in unruly behaviour, and police intervention invites resistant and aggressive responses from crowd members. However, such outbursts are often difficult to predict since they may emerge from a myriad of possible trigger events. In order to further interpret celebratory rioting, this thesis examines a number of individual-centred and event-centred crowd theories to determine what is known about crowd behaviour. This study concludes that the analysis of a celebratory riot event requires a process-rooted approach, such as the Value-Added model, to account for the situational factors which shape the event’s precursors, transactions and aftermath.

This thesis focuses analytical attention on the annual Queen’s Homecoming Aberdeen street party in Kingston, Ontario which became riotous in 2005. This case study comprised an extensive media content analysis, Queen’s archival research, and direct observation at a number of student focus groups, committee meetings and student gatherings. This
study, which concludes with an analysis of the non-riotous Homecoming celebrations of 2006, revealed that the riot of 2005 was hardly unique; instead, it followed decades of intermittent student disturbances in the Queen’s student neighbourhood. Furthermore, the 2005 Aberdeen Street riot ultimately parallels the story of so many celebratory riots which have recently occurred and continue to emerge in a number of college and university towns across North America.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On Saturday September 24, 2005, over 5,000 party-goers gathered on a narrow two-block street in Kingston, Ontario to drink, socialize, and celebrate the highly anticipated annual Queen’s University Homecoming weekend. An event which traditionally honours returning alumni, Homecoming at Queen’s has become a public holiday among the young adults who flock to the large and unruly Aberdeen Street party in the Queen’s “student ghetto”. In 2005, however, the party drew an unparalleled number of Queen’s students, local high-school students and out-of-towners. As many members of the crowd became destructive and engaged in disorderly conduct, there developed a violent student confrontation with police officers. Later termed a “riot” (CTV News 2005) in national and local media sources, the unsanctioned gathering ultimately resulted in the overturning and burning of a car, a sea of broken beer bottles, and an exceptional number of student injuries, arrests, and fines.

While the Queen’s neighbourhood has hosted noisy unsanctioned student gatherings for decades, the unprecedented disorder of the 2005 Homecoming assembly on Aberdeen Street weakened already poor town-gown relations and incited a moral panic in the Kingston community.

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1 Queen’s Homecoming 2005 was given extensive and predominantly negative coverage in local media sources including the Kingston Whig-Standard, the Queen’s Journal, Kingston this week, the Queen’s Gazette, Alumni News, and CKWS radio, and in national news outlets including the National Post, CBC News, and CTV.

2 Moral panics reflect widespread public concern surrounding an object, group of people or condition which suddenly comes to be construed in the media, by politicians, and by expert diagnoses as a danger to the idealistic interests of society. Cohen’s Folk Devils and
Subsequently, local efforts were taken to develop initiatives aimed at eradicating any negative consequences that future Homecoming celebrations might have on community relations, the university’s reputation and the safety of students, police officers, and other local residents. When Homecoming arrived in 2006, the obvious improvement in student-police relations and in the temperament of most student participants resulted in an event which, although unsanctioned, and which also resulted in numerous arrests, fines and injuries, was ultimately labelled non-riotous in character.

CELEBRATORY RIOTS: AN OVERVIEW

The Queen’s Homecoming case of 2005 mirrors typical occurrences in many North American university and college neighbourhoods- including the street party’s iconic moment- the late night overturning and burning of a car. Recent academic interest in such non-protest related student gatherings, which frequently coincide with a notable holiday, festival or sporting match, has led to the emergence of a sub-area of collective behaviour studies which focuses on what are termed “celebratory riots”\(^3\). The term refers to events which result from large non-

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\(^3\) The use of the term “celebratory riots” is sometimes problematic for two reasons. Firstly, not all incidents classified as celebratory riots necessarily stem from gatherings which are initially celebratory in nature. In some cases, rowdy student gatherings following sports matches may reflect fans’ disappointment in the favoured team’s loss. Secondly, the term riot itself is vague and often misused. While Michigan State University defines a riot specifically as “‘five or more persons, acting in concert, who engage in violent conduct and thereby intentionally or recklessly cause or create a serious risk of causing public terror or alarm’” (Buettner 2004:3), others deem a gathering riotous if merely “one or more individuals within a gathering engage in violence against person or property” (Kenny et al. 2001:18). Subsequently, defining a student disturbance as a riot can be misleading since the term carries heavy preconceptions and because the definitive
protest related assemblies of (mostly) students, at which alcohol is consumed freely, participants spontaneously engage in unruly behaviour, and police intervention invites resistant and aggressive responses from crowd members (Buettner 2004; Madensen and Eck 2006; Ohio State University 2003; University of New Hampshire 2003a, 2003b). Research indicates that since 1985 celebratory riots have occurred in 19 university or college neighbourhoods across the United States (Ohio State University 2003:30) and to a lesser extent, across Canada. 

Furthermore, it is argued that since 1985, celebratory riots have escalated in size, frequency, and damages rendered. Between 1985 and 2001, 178 serious student disturbances were recorded in the United States—nearly two-thirds (64%) of those celebratory riots occurring between 1996 and 2001. Each incident resulted in a mean property damage estimated at over $40,000 (Buettner 2004:4). Many observers fear that if student party riots continue to escalate, the true cost of these disturbances will involve increased risk of participant injury and even death.

Several American institutions directly affected by such incidents, including Ohio State University, Iowa State University and the University of New Hampshire, have conducted student and administrator surveys intended to probe the causes of and thus the means to prevent their future characteristics of riots are often inconsistent. The terms “student party riots” (Madensen and Eck 2006), “issueless riots” (Marx 1970), “mixed-issue campus disturbances” (Buettner 2004) and “convivial gatherings” (McCarthy, Martin and McPhail 2005) have also been used, or arguably misused, when referring to unruly student disturbances. In this study, I will continue to use the term celebratory riots since this was the most commonly used term in local discussions surrounding the problem of Homecoming.

While celebratory riots have been recorded at multiple Canadian institutions including Queen’s, Bishop’s, Mount Allison and St. Frances Xavier, no comprehensive studies providing national statistics have yet been published (Ramsden and Mansell 2006).
occurrence. Some American universities have organized national conventions on celebratory riots in order to promote awareness and to encourage a dialogue about such incidents.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGY

This study focuses analytical attention on the 2005 and 2006 Queen’s Homecoming celebrations on Aberdeen Street in Kingston, Ontario. It was my intention to describe the riotous Homecoming event of 2005, the comparative non-riotous Homecoming event of 2006, and to explain the differences between these events and their contexts. The thesis draws on a number of diverse literatures including those relating to crowds and crowd behaviour, the history of student unrest, the political complications which shape community responses to such events, and the broader interpretations of student party culture. These literatures help situate the Homecoming disturbances relative to the broader issue of celebratory riots and facilitate an investigation of the effectiveness of certain community initiatives. As a result, it is also possible to engage in some speculation about the future of Aberdeen Street. Finally, I reflect on this study’s limitations and suggest some avenues for future research.

The focal point of this study, an exploration into the Aberdeen Street case and its “contextual conditions” (Yin 2003:13), required that I make use of research methods suited to case studies, including municipal records, newspaper documents, observational data (Berg 2007; Yin 2003), as well as the investigation into similar cases. Concerns relating to the generalizability of case studies, which often aim to investigate “a
contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin 2003:13), require that use be made of a comparison case. Accordingly, the Aberdeen Street case is compared to the Ohio State University celebratory riot of November 2002 (Buettner 2004; Ohio State University 2003). In the case of the Aberdeen events, it was possible to make use of a variety of case study-related data sources, including documents (Williams 1989) and reports (Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space 2006; Ramsden and Mansell 2006), news media content and press releases (Kingston Whig Standard 2005, 2006; Queen’s Journal 2005, 2006, Queen’s Alumni Review 2005, 2006), historical accounts (Carpenter 1990; Malcolm and Dawe 1994; Neatby 1978), and direct observations. In this way it is possible to address, at least partially, some of the methodological concerns that are raised with respect to case studies (Yin 2003:10-11). These included data which I collected as a non-participant observer at Kingston’s ad-hoc Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space (CSLU) meetings, as well as several focus groups held in connection with the work of that Committee (Sacco 2006b). I also attended the 2006 welcoming ceremony for new Queen’s students presided over by Principal Karen Hitchcock, meetings of the Queen’s Senate, and a number of Homecoming festivities. Such personal observations allowed me to confirm event details and also record information “directly without having to rely on the retrospective or anticipatory accounts of others” (Mann and Stewart 2004:385). Furthermore, the CSLU and City Council minutes, and local and national media content were analyzed as were a number of
Queen’s University archival documents. The case study approach undertaken in this exploratory study provided a “comprehensive research strategy” (Yin 2003:14) for data collection and analysis subsequently applied to the broader theoretical findings on celebratory riots (Berg 2007; Yin 2003).

In chapter two, I define the terms ‘crowd’ and ‘riot’ and outline the major theories which are used to interpret these phenomena. It is argued that in order to undertake a comprehensive study of the Aberdeen Street event, celebratory riots must first be understood as crowd events which generate behaviour different from that which is observed in small group settings. A distinction is made between individual-centred crowd theories, which explain crowd behaviour as a direct consequence of physical, emotional, or logical drives specific to crowd members and event-centred crowd theories, which argue that such behaviour results from a series of successive conditions and factors which necessarily shape the individual’s experience of the crowd and his or her subsequent responses to that experience.

Chapter three reviews the histories of student unrest, celebratory riots, and Homecoming at Queen’s. In doing so, this chapter traces the evolution of student assembly from its initially political nature to its recent, largely “issueless”5 forms, with respect to which the means has ultimately

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5 Marx (1970) hypothesized three types of riots: (1) instrumental riots which reflect the presence of an objective-guiding generalized belief; (2) riots in which a generalized belief exists but is not geared towards the reconciliation of a group’s problem; (3) issueless riots which lack generalized protest beliefs. Since 1985, North American student disturbances have been predominantly issueless (Buettner 2004; Ohio State University 2003).
become the ends. Decades of partying in the Queen’s student ghetto in combination with the common occurrence of rowdy celebratory disturbances occurring in university and college town across North America lead to the conclusion that what happened on Aberdeen Street is not exceptional in any way.

Chapter four provides an overview of various community reactions to celebratory riots and the role that local political interests play in shaping the dominant responses to such events. The aftermath of the 2005 Aberdeen Street disturbance included increased public concern and the formation of the Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space (CSLU) which was charged with recommending initiatives to deal with the emergent problem. These responses are common among American college and university towns experiencing such unruly gatherings, while the level of local panic and the power vested in certain stakeholder groups often determines the varied outcome of each town’s subsequent solutions.

This chapter also examines how the community’s initial concerns were ultimately undermined by competing claims of ownership (Gusfield 1981) involving the Queen’s student government (Alma Mater Society (AMS)) in collaboration with Queen’s administrators, a volunteer initiative group, and the Kingston police force.

Finally, chapter five reviews and accounts for the differences and similarities between the 2005 and 2006 Homecoming events. As a non-participant observer at the 2006 Homecoming celebrations, I was able to
verify media accounts of the event, draw similarities and differences to the
2005 event, and finally, deduce that the overturned car and broken beer
bottle hazard of 2005 were central to its initial description and
subsequently common characteristics as a riot event.

Lastly, this study raises a number of unanswered questions
cconcerning the Aberdeen Street case and student party riots in general.
CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CROWD

This chapter examines a variety of theoretical perspectives in order to determine what is and what is not known about crowds, crowd behaviour and riotous events.

To begin, the chapter outlines individual-centred theories of the crowd, including contagion, normative and rational choice explanations. Although many hypotheses drawn from these theories are supported by empirical evidence of crowd behaviour in riotous gatherings, some elements of these arguments lack empirical support. For example, assumptions that crowds are “homogeneous entities” (Kenny et al. 2001:12) which hinder individual cognition, that they are characterized by a common emotional mood or that they necessarily involve violence have been refuted in recent years (ibid; McCarthy, Martin and McPhail 2005; McPhail 1991).

Recent work on the social psychology of the crowd has led to conclusions that crowds are better described as progressive gatherings—essentially processes which comprise a beginning, a middle and an end—and that these assemblies seldom lead to violence and rioting. In order to account for a gathering’s many phases of development, this chapter then examines event-centred explanations of the crowd which conceive of the riot as a “social event” (Sacco and Kennedy 2008:36) which can be broken down into a number of stages each of which uniquely contributes to crowd behaviour. Furthermore, although social, political, and economic factors
are often inconsistent predictors of a riot, these elements undoubtedly influence the shape and character of a gathering.

**DEFINING A CROWD**

For purposes of this study, I use the term ‘crowd’ to describe the temporary physical assembly of a large group of people “who are in interaction and whose interaction is affected by some sense that they constitute a unit” (Turner and Killian 1972:5). While attempts to explain group activity differ among theorists, contemporary work upholds that the crowd represents “both many individuals and a totality” (ibid:6). Such gatherings arise for any number of reasons, may exhibit many levels of organization, and attract a variety of individuals or small groups with a multitude of motives for assembling (Kenny et al. 2001:13).

**DEFINING A RIOT**

Since the focal point of this study is the examination of riotous gatherings, it is essential to differentiate between a crowd and a riot. Described by most as a hostile crowd event, specific definitions of the riot are fairly diverse (Marx 1970:3). However, for present purposes a ‘riot’, represents a disorderly crowd event that occurs when at least one individual within the assemblage becomes violent or destructive in ways that violate another individual or damage property (Kenny et al. 2001:18). Riotous gatherings are difficult to predict since they are often spontaneous and may be attributed to a number of initiating sources, including “poverty, hunger, unemployment, strikes, industrial disputes, politics, religious and ethnic differences, sports, alcohol, and even the weather” (ibid:6). Riots,
which have occurred over time in every era and in every area of the world (ibid), may result in a number of consequences including personal injury, death and damage to public and private property. McPhail (cited in Kenny et al. 2001:10) identifies four types of riots: “celebration riots” which stem from festivities, “commodity riots” which involve looting and vandalism and tend to occur alongside poverty-related issues, “communal riots” which result from racial, ethnic, religious, or language rivalries, or “police riots” which arise when law enforcement authorities provoke unjustified violence against civilians. Within the range of riotous events, McPhail asserts that modern North American rioting is predominantly celebratory in nature and tends to accompany sports victories. Ultimately, since riots are primarily situational, the nature of these incidents is constantly transforming over time and space.

**INDIVIDUAL-CENTRED THEORIES OF THE CROWD**

Individual-centred theories of crowd behaviour, including contagion, normative, and rational choice theories, each offer competing explanations for individual actions. Firstly, contagion theories blame an epidemic of mass irrationality specific to crowds for the infectious spread of unconscious and instinctual behavior that leads to disorder and rioting (Blumer

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6 The most famous police riot in contemporary American history took place in 1968 amidst anti-war protests at the Chicago Democratic Convention (Kenny et al 2001:10).

7 Notable North American sports riots took place “after the Chicago Bulls NBA championships in 1992, the Denver Broncos Super Bowl victory in 1999, the Michigan State NCAA championship in 1999 and Los Angeles Lakers NBA championship in 2000” (Kenny et al. 2001:19). The most significant modern Canadian sports riot occurred in Montreal after the Montreal Canadiens won the Stanley Cup championship game in 1993 (Roberts and Benjamin 2000).
Normative theories, on the other hand, argue that crowd behavior results from the emergence or strengthening of widespread norms among participants which then shape their actions within the crowd. By conforming to the group’s goals and interests, crowd members validate newly introduced ideas about how to behave within the crowd setting and subsequently fulfill individual roles in an emergent division of labour (Shibutani 1966, 1970; Smelser 1962, 1972; Turner and Killian 1972). Finally, rational choice theories explain crowd behaviour as the product of an assembly of many individuals acting no differently than they do exterior to the crowd. Rational participation is rooted in personal motivations, and members of the crowd are therefore conceived of as free-thinking individuals capable of weighing the costs and benefits of crowd involvement (Berk 1974; Dollard and Miller 1950; Raiffa 1982). These theories offer a variety of possible explanations for the crowd’s assembly, its dynamic, its breaking point, and its responses to forces of social control. However, while these explanations offer extensive accounts for an individual’s actions within a crowd setting, these theories fail to take into consideration specific social factors which also contribute to the overall nature of the event and subsequently shape participant behaviour.

**CONTAGION THEORIES**

Contagion theories, which became popular at the end of the 19th century, conceive of all crowds as irrational entities under which participants engage in uniform behavior. Undoubtedly influenced by public
fear of the unexplainable during a time when supernatural causes were more commonly used to explain most deviant behaviour (Ellis 1985), theories of contagion blame the crowd’s assembly, its disposition, its shift to riotous proportions, and its resistance to social control measures on forces which lie beyond an individual’s control.

**Crowd Assembly**

Gustave LeBon’s (1896) original theory of contagion conceives of the crowd’s assembly as an effect of participants’ subconscious attraction to powerful images and hypnotic techniques employed by crowd leaders. Such theoretical explanations of the crowd’s assembly leave no room for individual agency. Since contagion theories argue that an individual is drawn into a crowd against his or her will, these theories also dismiss protest events such as worker strikes and revolutions (King 1990:45; Nye 1999) as illegitimate actions. Understanding the crowd assembly as nothing more than a destructive attack against the dominant social order (LeBon 1896; Taine 1878) was not uncommon during the French Revolution, nor is it any more uncommon today for elite members of society to characterize race riots, looting, or other destructive behaviour of perceived lower classes as reversions to animal instincts.

Over the years, contagion theories began to focus on the characteristics of individuals who are drawn to crowd assemblies. Work of theorists such as Klapp (1969:41) led to proposals that crowds distinctly attract members of society who are exceptionally “vulnerable to influence”. Thus, contagion theorists depict the emergence of crowds as a
fated response to the accumulation of individual tensions which arise
“from cultural values of work and achievement, and the trauma of
adjusting to rapid and continuous change” (Klapp 1969 cited in Miller
2000:26). Accordingly, Klapp contends that many crowds naturally attract
“young people, especially students”, particularly if they are “not settled in
with new networks of social involvement” (Rose 1982:84). For example,
observations of urban unrest among British youth in the mid-1990’s cite
youth alienation as the underlying cause of the city-wide firebombing and
other destructive group activity that peaked when locally-organized leisure
and social activities including dance parties and raves were abruptly
cancelled by police. The sudden surge in youth disorder was seen as a
direct consequence of estrangement from youth workers and services that
kept “bored young people” busy and out of trouble (Farrar 1995:3).

Citing shared tensions and social pressures as the root causes of
irrationally acting groups, Klapp (cited in Miller, 2000:26) describes the
assembly of crowds as “mass hysterias”, which break out when the
“weakest people buckle under tension” (ibid) and then result in “the
bandwagon stage in which everyone participates” (ibid). This is often
exemplified by crowds of young people which form in urban areas after
bars close and which result in various forms of “late night disorder”
(Rigakos 2006:3), such as fights and acts of vandalism. Police officers
attempt to disrupt the formation of such crowds with patrol wagons outside
large bars, increased police cruisers for crowd control and uniformed
officers who physically “take up station” (ibid) at late night hangouts.
Contagion theories support this police initiative, as these theories contend that this type of urban violence and destruction is an inevitable effect of the milling and circular reaction (Blumer 1962) which occur within intoxicated and emotional crowds. This account of the assembly and initial character of large gatherings mirrors the “mental unity of crowds” (LeBon 1896:2) described in the earliest assessment of group behaviour, whereby crowds, consisting of normally law-abiding citizens, are conceived of as problematic since they are seen to produce only negative behaviour and will presumably become riotous.

**Crowd Dynamic**

Contagion theories posit that in crowd settings individual cognition is affected by “neighbour neural networks” (Artyushkin et al. 1990:168) which overwhelm and disrupt individual decision-making capacities. Subsequent arguments claim that collective behaviour is “purely ethological” (ibid:177) as it “does not depend on the subjects’ concrete knowledge and the topic of discussion” (ibid), but is alternately linked to a state in which the individual is “not thinking” (ibid). Crowd members subsequently lose their rational abilities when the “intensity” (ibid) of social contact within the crowd increases. Under this explanation of crowd behaviour, the only real form of control within the crowd is held by the crowd’s leader, who often begins as one of the led but is elevated as the crowd “instinctively” (LeBon 1896:118) puts itself under the “authority of a chief” (ibid). These ringleaders or agitators then replace public
authorities as the voice of crowd direction and call to action (ibid:122); therefore, police and other authority figures must locate and negotiate with this leader in order to disperse the crowd (McCarthy et al. 2005:32). Due to a largely unanimous agreement among contagion theorists that crowds act unconsciously, the majority of early crowd studies claim that in the case of criminally acting crowds, accountability for crowd behaviour could “only be extended to the leaders who had set the group in motion” (Nye 1975:76).

Contagion theories further contend that by using affirmation and repetition (LeBon 1896:125), certain ideas are “fixed” (ibid) within the crowd and quickly become recognized as truths, resulting in the formation of a “collective mind” (ibid) among crowd participants, such that “the sentiments and ideas of all persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes” (ibid:2), albeit for only as long as the life of the crowd (ibid:127). Such suggestions, which have led to the development of crowd stereotypes including groupthink and crowd mentality, imply that a person acting under the influence of the crowd becomes an “automaton” (ibid:13), only exhibiting “those mediocre qualities” (ibid:9) which every human being inherently possesses. Once this unanimity emerges, a “current of opinion” (ibid:128), for example the shouting of chants such as “fuck the police” during the 2005 Queen’s Homecoming riot, is formed and then infectiously spread throughout the crowd. This emotional contagion, which spreads opinions as well as “certain modes of feeling” (ibid:130) occurs at a rapid speed “which
explains the suddenness of panics” (ibid:128). Contagion theorists would argue that certain actions within the crowd such as widespread spectator participation in the “wave”, as well as chanting, clapping, cheering and booing at sports matches are all exemplary of the crowd’s contagious effects on its members. However, while some participant action may reflect elements of contagion, the assumption that the crowd causes participants to act as one entity has not been supported by empirical evidence. Instead, studies show that crowd members rarely act “in unison” (Kenny et al. 2001:1), but if they do, it does not carry on for very long.

**Shift from Crowd to Riot**

Contagion theories propose that once a sporadic crowd emerges, there comes an inevitable point at which violence and disorder ensue. Blumer (1962:83) describes this process as a *circular reaction*, which occurs when the “process of interstimulation” among crowd members incites “heightened arousal and excitement, erratic behaviour, and increased suggestibility” (ibid). Subsequently, not only do actions and emotions spread contagiously throughout the crowd, but certain reactions become embedded in the crowd participants’ patterns of behaviour (ibid:187). The process of circular reaction forces each member to respond and react to the actions of others and in turn generate “opportunities and provocations to which the others must respond” (Crossley 2002:674). For example, it has been argued that during the 1970 Kent State University student demonstration against the war in Vietnam, students, reacting to the actions of the National Guard, exhibited this type of instinctive response.
After members of the Guard, called in by local authorities to subdue protestors, launched several canisters of tear gas into the crowd, the students did not retreat, but instead picked up the canisters and threw them back, just like a “‘tennis match’” (Lewis 1972:94). Many even “cheered each exchange” (ibid). In cases such as this, the crowd’s proclamations and actions are quickly shaped by circular reaction which ultimately overpowers individual voices.

The effects of circular reaction can also be found in the recent “wave of anticorporate protest” (Crossley 2002:681). At such assemblies, “‘agitators’” (ibid) take advantage of the powers of circular reaction to “accentuate strains” (ibid), to fix the “dominant ‘situational definition’” (ibid), and to draw attention to “specific popular concerns” (ibid). Therefore, although participants in Western protests against large corporate organizations, including the International Monetary Fund (2000), The Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (2001) and the G8 summit (2001) may hold dissimilar opinions and political standpoints, once crowds are formed, individual concerns are suppressed in favour of one dominant objective (ibid).

Contagion theories are often called upon when attempting to explain collective behavior that is violent and has dangerous consequences. Under a largely “hypnotic” (Berk 1974:30) state of mind, contagion theorists warn that a crowd of independently “peaceful law abiding citizens” (ibid) will transform into a mass of people ready to “take the law into their own hands and commit acts of violence for which they are later
ashamed” (ibid). Instead of merely spreading opinions and chants, crowd members will eventually become dangerous and smash beer bottles, break store windows, light fires, assault authority figures, and trample injured accomplices. Such uncharacteristic behavior stems from the hypnotic effects of intense milling during which people “cannot hear themselves think” (Blumer cited in Miller 2000:25).

Furthermore, contagion theorists assert that power in numbers creates a sense of anonymity within the crowd and leads individuals to follow up on “impulsive” (LeBon 1896:43) urges they most likely would not act on (ibid:20) without the crowd’s offering of “temporary but immense strength” (ibid:36). Depictions of the 1992 riots in the streets of Chicago after the Chicago Bulls basketball team won the NBA championship illustrate the value of this explanation as a prime example of the “opportunistic criminality” (Rosenfeld 1997:498) which resulted in unprecedented looting and rioting all over the city as crowds stormed the streets.

Studies of sports riots suggest that environmental factors also play a large role in contagion theories. For example, an established “positive relationship between heat and aggression” (Lang and Lang 1970:109; Russell 2004:361) has been found in the majority of riots that stem from celebratory crowds. In addition to heightened attendance and consumption of alcohol, warm spells could explain why riots break out in some sports spectator crowds and not others, as violent outbursts have a greater chance of occurring on warmer days when fans’ “arousal” (ibid) peaks. The above
factors each seem to weaken crowd members’ decision-making abilities and may then lead such crowds to display heightened violence and other riotous behaviour.

Responses to Social Control

According to theories of contagion, control of the crowd may be extremely difficult since crowd members are ultimately unaffected by “fundamental social pressures” (Berk 1974:31). Under such conceptions of the crowd, threats from outside institutions are unlikely to deter certain individuals and prevent select crowd members from behaving destructively. Accordingly, authorities at the Euro 2000 football championship acted on assumptions of crowd homogeneity and irrationality when the Belgian police arrested over 800 non-threatening crowd members, later admitting that many of those arrests were merely “preventative” (Weed 2001:413). Also afraid of potentially destructive crowd behavior at the Euro 2000 matches, the riot police decided to utilize tear gas to disperse non-riotous crowds before any disturbances occurred, which led to what was later described as “indiscriminate” (ibid) police action. Assumptions of a naturally uncontrollable crowd was also evidenced in Germany’s decision to “pre-emptively” (ibid:414) ban many football fans from traveling to the championship in order to prevent any German association with anticipated rioting. Such actions stemmed from assumptions that crowd members “lose their capacity to reason and therefore to control their own behaviour” (McCarthy et al. 2005:10).
Accordingly, conceptions of the crowd under contagion theories argue that social control can be attained only by dissolving the crowd altogether.

Overall, contagion theories of behaviour focus on individual vulnerability of crowd members and the crowd’s impressionable effects in order to explain the crowd’s assembly, its character, its shift to a state of unruliness and its responses (or lack thereof) to measures of social control. Such explanations may clarify why people in crowds behave in otherwise uncharacteristic ways; however, many studies (Dollard and Miller 1950; Lang and Lang 1970; McPhail 1971; Raiffa 1982) have cast doubt on assertions that crowd members act unconsciously and irrationally. Furthermore, other explanations (Berk 1974; Turner and Killian 1972) of crowd behaviour see an obvious division of labour that not only differentiates members, resulting in a heterogeneous crowd population, but also casts doubt on the necessity of a leader. Ultimately, contagion theories blame behaviour exhibited within the crowd on the crowd’s diffusion of hypnotic pressures which influence each member subconsciously and result in uncharacteristic participant behaviour. Therefore, although contagion theories of crowd behaviour such as the “mob mentality” are still widely cited in modern interpretations of collective disturbances, these individual-centred theories do not by themselves offer a comprehensive explanation for crowd behaviour.

NORMATIVE THEORIES
As crowd studies gained popularity in the latter half of the 20th century, more attention was thrust upon the norms which might govern the behavior of crowd members. Most observation of early crowd behavior took place in gatherings that were eventually termed ‘protests’ once social issues were acknowledged. Here, systemic reasons for crowd formations became more apparent, and although many protest groups were opposed by dominant hegemonic voices, protest groups managed to gain legitimacy by many social theorists.

Normative theories of behaviour reveal that crowds in and of themselves “serve a function” (Holmwood, 2005:87), since they construct and reinforce norms and behavioural standards both within the crowd and exterior to it, foster the emergence of social bonds which regulate individuals and counter the development of anomie, and offer public visibility to otherwise powerless groups in society.

Normative theories offer emotionally-rooted explanations for the crowd’s assembly, its dynamic, its shift to mayhem, and its reactions to forces of social control. According to these theories, crowd behaviour is the product of the collective expression of an emergent set of values and prescribed behaviors that arise only once a group has been formed. The norms, shaped by the group’s specific dynamic, immediately bind group members together and instill in them a sense of loyalty and emotional attachment to the group itself (Turner and Killian 1972).

Crowd Assembly
Normative theories explain the crowd formation as a result of participants’ strong desire to identify with a group and form a “shared understanding” (Turner and Killian 1972:22) among those with similar social ties. Along these lines, Turner and Killian (ibid:5) discovered that crowd members respond to “group norms” and are aware that they “constitute a unit” (ibid). Therefore, the normative crowd is formed by individuals who, although exhibiting diverse motives, do in fact strive to become part of a collective and may even seek to fulfill, as many Woodstock 1999 crowd participants agreed, “a desire to be part of history” (Vider 2004:161). Studies of football riots in Europe have shown that crowd members often gather with the intentions of contributing to and feeding off the elevated emotional atmosphere that is observed in crowds. In the case of the 1989 Hillsborough crowd crush in Liverpool which resulted in the death of 95 and the injury of 170 soccer fans, the observers “were not content to simply follow the match through the media; rather they wanted to be participants in the spectacle itself” (Lewis and Kelsey 1994: 206).

Klapp (1969:34) also cites the “lack of identifying ritual(s)” in everyday life as responsible for enticing individuals to join crowds, where they hope to establish an increased “sense of identification” (ibid). Stronger group bonds and increased devotion to emergent norms are also observed in crowds “with which friendship groups are associated” (Spaulding 1970:91). As a result of “ego deprivation” (Klapp 1970:71) and an unfulfilled “need for recognition” (ibid), student riots come as no
surprise to many, as university and college students often develop intense ties to student groups, but neglect to form bonds with the greater community. This results in students’ “lack of engagement” (Ohio State University 2003:37) in neighborhood and community events and leads to a greater “propensity to be destructive” (ibid) when converging off-campus. Overall, normative theories maintain that the anticipated formation of group bonds and unifying experiences is central to the appeal of joining a crowd.

Crowd Dynamic

Although various normative theories differ regarding the point at which shared norms emerge, they all assume that the group dynamic is shaped largely by crowd members who, confronting “novel or ambiguous situations” (Miller 2000:27), must collectively respond to successive trigger events. On one hand, Turner and Killian’s Emergent-Norm theory (1972) explains the crowd’s unified will to act as an effect of the sense of a collective identity generated only once the group has assembled. On the other hand, some normative theories, such as Social Categorization theory (Reicher cited in Vider 2004:147), expand on earlier explanations by arguing that such group-directing norms must “be understood as both a cause and effect, reinforcing and reinforced by group formation and group action”. In some cases it is evident that many crowd members may in fact hold similar beliefs prior to the crowd’s formation, which is responsible for their strong sense of connection to one another and hence their willingness to bind together when threatened. For instance, in the case of Britain’s
“mods and rockers” working-class youth moral panics of 1964, Cohen (1980:20) cites “status frustration”, “blocked leisure opportunities” (ibid) and built-up tension between the two groups as major sources of generalized beliefs which sparked the series of gang fights on the beaches of England’s holiday resorts. Therefore, a collective drive towards unusually radical objectives relies on both the construction of norms for group behavior which are developed within the crowd as well as broader generalized beliefs which precede the crowd formation.

The crowd dynamic emerges under conditions which shape norms quickly as deviant behavior is openly punished and compliance is rewarded. Due to the nature of expected rewards- acceptance and a sense of belonging- “habitual conformity” (Berk 1974:65) tends to be unconscious because crowd members are already “prepared to follow the dictates of the group” (ibid). Here, those susceptible to peer pressure are most likely to act in ways they think the crowd will approve of, and those who choose not to conform overtly to group expectations either retreat or remain quiet. Once possible dissenters disappear and the crowd is left only with those supporting the emergent norm, either through action or inaction, which can also provide “passive support” (ibid) to the group. For example, in the case of the 1999 Woodstock festival-turned-riot, Vider (2004:150) proposes that “in the absence of active condemnation, rioters may have assumed that all bystanders, cheering or not, shared and supported their actions and beliefs”. Therefore, all participant responses ultimately further the “illusion of unanimity” (Turner and Killian 1972:23) within the crowd.
as it continues to shape and exhibit the norms that define and guide participants’ behaviour.

Ultimately, characterization of the crowd under these theories of emotionality emphasizes the importance of a perceived consensus within the crowd in order to regulate the group’s behavior and guide it towards a distinct collective goal (Berk 1974:64). For example, the interaction in a class lecture of 25 students who participated in a collective walkout reveals that the “successful implementation of a new line of coordinated conduct is directly related to the commitments which acting units make to one another to perform the new line of conduct” (McPhail 1969:449). In this case, oral agreements to participate in the walkout secured 23 of the 25 students in a position of pressure to follow through with their “commitments” (ibid), while the two students who did not commit to the group were not compelled to conform, and subsequently, did not partake in the walkout. Ultimately, this study suggests that group conformity is largely dependent on “the absence of a challenge or dissent to the course of action” (ibid:450). Thus, perceived consensus explanations do indeed imply a sense of social identity still exists within the crowd; however, the idea of a perceived consensus poses a paradoxical problem for normative explanations since it supports a “behavioral unity with cognitive diversity” (Vider 2004:149).

Furthermore, when specific prescriptions for group behaviour are not initially evident within the crowd, they may emerge once a distinct incident occurs to trigger an increased need for group unification. For
example, even if crowd members collectively harbor a disrespect for public authorities prior to the crowd’s formation, it takes a specific situation in which certain cues are triggered in order for most rioters to exhibit public disregard for the police and other authority figures (Turner and Killian 1972). At the Hillsborough football match, increased intensity of crowd cheering and shouting cued the start of the soccer match and thus led crowd members outside of the stadium to storm authorities who attempted to deny them entrance. Subsequently, the crowd members proceeded to “push and force their way forward” (Lewis and Kelsey 1994:194) into the event, trampling over others unknowingly as the crowd continued to move together. Turner and Killian (1972:163) also cite the example of the riotous New Orleans’ Mardi Gras festival in 1955, where a rapid conversion of the prevailing crowd mood changed from happiness to one of rage after police officers attempted to arrest one of the crowd members. This prompted partiers to shift their non-threatening celebratory behaviour to exhibitions of aggression and protest. Many celebrants subsequently threw rocks at cars and buses “with the police as their target” (ibid). Here, normative theorists observe a distinct trigger that brings out certain attitudes in the crowd’s members that would “not necessarily have become dominant had they been acting as individuals” (ibid:8). Therefore, although the group’s behavioural path may not be pre-conceived, the presence of ambiguously similar norms paired with mass conformity to an emergent group standard are the key defining aspects of the collectivity observed by normative approaches.
Shibutani (1966:17) concludes that the spreading of norms throughout the crowd relies mainly on rumors, which are used to organize appropriate crowd behavior when people face “ambiguous” situations and lack immediate responses. Rumors, “shaped, reshaped, and reinforced in a succession of communicative acts” (ibid:9), may in fact be “regarded as a form of collective problem-solving” (ibid:17). Crowd responses shaped by rumors are largely unpredictable due to the surplus of “exaggerations” (Rose 1982:100) and constant manipulations that plague the various stages of circulation. Rumors of an evening riot were “unusually prominent” (Vider 2004:155) in the Woodstock riot of 1999, as they were already in full circulation at the concert that morning. In addition to sparking action inside the crowd, rumors that circulate outside of the crowd may also encourage large-scale riots. When Kent Sate University students participated in the 1970 protest against the Vietnam War, rumors circulating through Kent persuaded city authorities to act immediately and harshly under beliefs that “radical students had guns and might act as snipers” (Rudwick and Meier 1972:83). Once the National Guard was brought in to control student protests regarding the American invasion of Cambodia, rumours characterizing the protests as uncontrollable resulted in the killing of four university students. Crowd disorder, and in this case, a misperception of the situation’s seriousness, are likely outcomes when rumours involve a leveling (the shortening of accounts), sharpening (selective details), and assimilation (alteration of ideas to fit the generalized belief) of messages (Berk 1974:62). Lewis’s (1972:93)
analysis of the Kent State incident raises the possibility that rumors within the crowd downplayed the possibility of the Guard using excessive force, while rumors outside of the crowd failed to articulate the lack of violent plans on the part of the students. Surveys taken after the event show that the participants “thought they were safe” (ibid:89) and it is Lewis’s contention that “the majority of students just wanted to see what would happen” (ibid); however, a lack of communication between the riot police and the students led each party to make assumptions about the other party’s behavior based on rumor circulation. Ultimately, while emergent norm models hold rumor largely responsible for the construction of strong emotional affinities within the crowd and the circulation of behavioral instructions that jumpstart riots, these theories are unable to predict the shape a group’s norms will take in advance of the gathering.

**Shift from Crowd to Riot**

As an emotionally-oriented group, the crowd often tips into a state of unruliness with inaction, which is seen by crowd agitators as silent approval of shifting norms. Although few crowd members may act in a disorderly manner, overall crowd loyalty and failure to condemn rowdiness may lead to the appearance of “irrational and unrestrained” (Berk 1974:64) mass participation. Although the assumption of crowd homogeneity is seriously challenged by Turner and Killian’s observation of a distinct division of labor within the crowd, the “tendency to attribute to the group a mind” (Turner and Killian 1972:7) is still present as individual behavior is “patterned” into complementary roles that advance the group’s objectives
and goals. Normative theories are ultimately based on a collective effort in which crowd members take pride: “what one man does is determined in part by what others have left to be done” (ibid). For example, Berk observed such a division of labour when a large student gathering, organized to protest the Vietnam War, erected a barricade at a major street intersection. Within this crowd, some participants blocked the road, others tore down a nearby fence, while the remaining students dragged the pieces to the desired location of the barricade (Berk 1974:3). Although this view of the crowd allows for the observation of a distinct division of labour, normative theories still describe action within the crowd as something that all members engage in; therefore, when the crowd’s actions get out of hand, all participants are at fault and may all be held equally responsible for their “common” actions.

Responses to Social Control

According to these theories, as crowds members react to an emergent-norm, social controls do exist, but they are found only inside the crowd. As the crowd assembles, norms emerge; however, there is often no specific leader. Instead, norms are prescribed by assessing the general behaviour of one’s neighbours within the crowd and through a system of communication dispersing messages that are often “simply a reverse…of routine norms” (Rose 1982:108), seeing as how crowds generally arise “during periods of defiance of authority” (ibid). In fact, youth riots are often conceived of as a rebellion against authority and “the definition of themselves parents offer” (Klapp 1969:37). Fox’s (1987:348) study of the
punk counter-culture reveals that within member groups not only is there a “genuine disdain for the conventional system”, but the punks’ own norms and actions are also conceived of as representing a “higher good” (ibid). Accordingly, those who do not conform completely to group standards of specific conduct are shunned and labeled “pretenders” (ibid).

Furthermore, although the majority of student gatherings do not result in rioting (Ohio State University 2003:36), emergent norm theories argue that involvement in the community and volunteer experience is necessary in order to build competing norms in individuals that may otherwise only develop loyalty to groups which tend to defy society’s imposed norms. Ultimately, without the “tradition-imposed stability” (Turner and Killian 1972:6) of community standards, individuals in crowds are likely to conform to the prescriptions for behavior which emerge in crowd settings, regardless if these norms conflict with wider social standards.

While “anonymity” (Kelling and Wilson 1982:para13) and a lack of “communal barriers” (ibid) often observed in crowd settings are indeed conducive to crime, anonymity as a factor in heightened disorderly behavior is also challenged by Turner and Killian’s (1972:25) assertion that crowd members actually act in response to familiarity within the crowd. Although shared social identities may lead group members to engage in the crowd’s disorderly behavior, shared bonds are also central in restricting the crowd members’ aggression against each other. For example, the shared social role of “concertgoer”” (Vider 2004:148)
prevented crowd members from attacking other participants at the Woodstock disturbance. Furthermore, studies of crime and disorder in communities conclude that people connected by “primary group ties” (Fischer et al. 1998:676) are much more apt to share “a mutual interest in each other’s welfare” (ibid) and a sense of trust and respect stemming from routine encounters. Coincidentally, studies conducted on university leadership also conclude that professors who are largely known and admired are much more “instrumental” (Ellis and Keedy 1970:366) in shaping and controlling student behavior than those who, although possessing greater academic prestige and accomplishment, are largely unknown to students. Also, as individuals in the crowd are less likely to take behavioral cues from unfamiliar actors, foot patrol police officers who are well known to crowd members have a greater chance of maintaining order within the crowd than anonymous officers (Kelling and Wilson 1982).

Furthermore, authoritative figures representing societal demands outside of the crowd are often compelled to take extreme action in order to halt the disorder that is perceived to be beyond the rationalisation of individual members. Outside observers may see this as a group “driven forward less by the prize of ‘seizing power’ than by the heavy costs of failing to seize power once the struggle [has] crossed a certain threshold” (Walden 194:412). Under this conception, the crowd may appear ruthless since crowd members may feel they have nothing to lose but their unity. Therefore, police and others attempting to restore order may feel forced to
resort to extreme measures when making arrests and doling out punishment if individuals’ loyalty to the crowd and defence of other crowd members’ dangerous actions cannot be dissolved and results in destructive behaviour.

Overall, theories of emotionality cite an individual’s inherent desire to identify with a group and form a shared understanding as a key factor which leads to the assembly of a crowd. Furthermore, normative theories draw primarily from the emergence and widespread circulation of shared values and behavioural prescriptions within the crowd to explain the group dynamic, the crowd’s shift to a riotous event, and its responses to forces of social control. While these theories do explain heightened group loyalty and cooperation observed within crowds, normative theories fail to explain why individuals seek membership in a crowd rather than membership in groups opposing such crowds. Furthermore, such theories cannot predict the crowd’s inclination towards one set of norms over another before the fact.

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORIES

In order to explain the crowd’s assembly, its subsequent character, its tipping point to rowdiness and its responses to social control measures, theories of rational choice focus on personal motivations and social controls which deter or encourage participants to engage in particular behaviours based on the potential costs and rewards that these actions are likely to render (Berk 1974; Dollard and Miller 1950; Raiffa 1982).
Furthermore, Hall (2003:38) asserts that an evolution in collective behavior studies has led many theorists to observe profuse evidence of “agency, organization, and culture” characterizing individual choices made within the crowd. Rational choice theories essentially conceive of rioters as logical actors “with their own notions of order” (Lang and Lang 1970:97).

Crowd Assembly

Rational choice theories propose that crowd members may be much more reasonable than previous studies claim, as joining a crowd may often “have its own rewards in terms of anticipated outcomes” (ibid:97). Rational theories use the weighing of rewards versus potential costs, sometimes referred to as “mini-max and game choices” (Miller 2000:45) or “economic-choice theories” (ibid), to explain crowd participation and subsequent behaviour observed within the crowd. For example, in the case of student gatherings, student participation results when certain students find that the benefits of crowd involvement outweigh the costs. Young partygoers at Ohio State University (OSU) explain that because “riots had become a ‘tradition’” (Ohio State University 2003a:161), a strong “desire to be part of history” (ibid) led them to the conscious decision to participate in celebratory gatherings despite an awareness of potential danger at these events. To these crowd members, the majority of whom are merely “onlookers who just want to be part of the event” (Hubbs 1997:para6), possessing a personalized recollection of the event
outweighed the chances of incurring personal injury, possible expulsion and criminal charges.

According to rational choice theories, shared personal circumstances and social ties among crowd participants precede the gathering and are also responsible for the crowd’s self-selection. Although the focus here is not on shared norms, an overarching generalized belief tends to exist, but remains unique as each member experiences it differently. During the assembling processes crowd members choose to adopt “convergent” (Miller 2000:43) behaviors and “mobilization is treated as a series of conscious choices by individuals” (Berk 1974:43). One way of determining who is likely to participate in crowd behavior is to assess the situation as rationally as possible: “those with more ‘resources’ to attain these rewards are more likely to indulge in this behavior” (Rose 1982:248). For example, crowd members who choose to participate in acts of streaking through crowds require an audience of spectators in order to give their actions any meaning or purpose (Aguirre, Mendoza and Quarantelli 1988:578).

Furthermore, mobilization to the site of assembly is dependent on specific factors: “the availability of information about a collective behavior opportunity, ease of access to the scene, and an absence of competing activities” (Berk 1974:43). In the case of riots at sporting events, access to tickets, transportation, free time and personal energy are all prerequisites to individual participation. Risk-assessment is also performed prior to attending events: “knowing there is a risk of injury or death is a cost but
for some a reward because it adds excitement to the match” (Lewis and Kelsey 1994:198). Subsequently, crowd members are unlikely to accidentally end up in a crowd; instead, one’s presence in a crowd must follow the discovery and location of a gathering likely to prove personally rewarding, followed by the successive arrangements for personal transport to the scene without veering off track on the way there.

**Crowd Dynamic**

Ultimately, the biggest factor to analyze in the crowd formation process, according to rational choice theories, pertains to the “competing instructions and demands” (Miller 2000:45) that plague and motivate certain individuals during the crowd definition and maintenance. McPhail (1991) observes a conscious cooperation of individuals as the crowd dynamic is formed through a multitude of differing actions, roles, and strategies, which in the case of Queen’s Homecoming would include consuming alcohol, interacting with friends, starting group chants and cheers, providing an audience, buying alcohol for minors, playing host to out of town guests, networking with alumni, collecting beer bottles for charity, or even overturning a car in order to keep the party going.

Subsequently, violence inside the crowd is rare, as competition and conflict are largely avoided in favor of collective teamwork (McPhail 1991:163). Although cooperation is prevalent, Raiffa’s (1982) Decision theory posits each crowd member continuously runs through a “prescriptive strategy” (Raiffa in Berk 1974:59) during which he or she differs from other members in his or her actions as different decisions and
choices are made at each step of the process. Here, individuals make progressive decisions which include finding out how to maximize one’s knowledge of the scenario, envisioning what is likely to happen, reciting possible options, ranking these options as they may correspond to rewarding outcomes, and choosing the actions which are likely to render the highest rewards. This explains why some strategically-planned acts, such as streaking, are not executed only by rowdy crowd members, but may also “become acceptable to many potential adopters” (Aguirre et al. 1988:572).

Using this theory, football hooliganism is also explained “not as a consequence of alienation and embitterment” (Weed 2001:419), but instead as a logical outcome of fans exemplifying a “generally aggressive, largely masculine English social culture” (ibid) that, combined with representatives of the “‘rough’ working class” (ibid), legitimizes and produces an everyday “respect for violent behaviour” (ibid: 416). Ultimately, rational choice theories contend that celebratory riots provide many young people with opportunities to showcase seemingly courageous behaviour. Just as chugging beer has “become a feat of skill” (University of Minnesota 2003:2), so do throwing bottles or tipping over cars, but only if these acts embody widely understood representations of admirable and revered behaviour. Consequently, roles played in the rational crowd, although often complementary, may also conflict as they are not sanctioned by members prior to the gathering, nor are they subject to mass conformity within the crowd.
Berk’s (1974:72) Game theory takes the rational crowd model to an even more calculated process, as it likens individual behavior to that of a challenge where those within the crowd not only attempt to “advance their own interests by recruiting others” (ibid), but also must consider the odds of receiving the crowd’s approval in order to “win” admiration from and control over other crowd members. This theory is exemplified with the “aggressive posturing” (Weed 2001:417) evident in football crowds that sees fans “taunt and bait opposing fans” (ibid) but overwhelmingly back down at the sign of any serious physical violence, often “relying on friends or older fans to drag them away, therefore saving face” (ibid). Evidence of the game is also illustrated through the acts of “keynoting” (Rose 1982:107) - “setting directions for collective action” -where winning depends on gaining the most substantial focus of the crowd’s attention. This competition stipulates that “different individuals with different ideas about what should be done about some situation are likely to compete for influence with one another” (ibid). While some crowd members do engage in aggressive violence, most of what occurs in football spectator crowds is merely a “game of bluff” (Weed 2001:417) that is won by “making opposing fans back down” (ibid) without crowd members actually physically fighting. This depiction of crowd behavior leads many sociologists to believe that it is in fact possible to theorize a rational crowd model in which members act logically, heterogeneously, and of their own free will.
Shift from Crowd to Riot

The point at which disarray usually emerges in the rational crowd often corresponds with a peak in the crowd’s density and visibility as well as the physical elevation of some crowd members. Once the crowd becomes a mass gathering, a perceived sense of anonymity arises, allowing crowd members to ignore many social controls which normally regulate their behaviour outside of the crowd. This then allows many actors to maximize the potential for gaining rewards within the crowd by reverting to increasingly deviant behavior. Increased visibility also has the potential to fuel increased disorder, as the “common use of bright search lights to intimidate crowds may actually facilitate mobilization” (Berk 1974:72) to the scene. Finally, crowd members who partake in extremely deviant behavior typically seek out attention by placing themselves at an elevated height, exemplified at the Aberdeen street riot by the crowd participants who climbed on top of the overturned car. Here, these extremely deviant outbursts are often mistaken for the norm and give false impressions of mass disorder that become representative of the entire crowd in “picture-oriented news coverage” (Lang and Lang 1970:101).

Another factor that is seen to transform an originally rational crowd into a disorderly gathering is the widespread consumption of alcohol despite the knowledge of its physical effects. Intoxication often sparks misunderstanding among individuals and initiates aggression, which can then result in violence and a heightened emotional response to perceived injustices. Subsequently, most university officials pinpoint “binge
drinking” (“Staying riot-free…” November 24, 2003:para3) as the “primary instigator of student rioting” (ibid). However, despite alcohol’s mind-altering effects, most observers contend that although alcohol may fuels disruptive behaviour, it is not necessarily the primary source of violence and property damage (Buettner 2004; Ohio State University 2003). The conscious decision to consume excessive amounts of alcohol is, instead, largely observed as the product of rationalization. Rigakos’ (2006:9) study of nightclub patrons in Halifax concludes that throughout the evening, as heightened tensions arise between intoxicated individuals, “more prudent and risk averse patrons will leave”.

Furthermore, Henry and Eaton’s (1999:92) assessment of student drinking habits concludes that individuals do assess the risk involved with alcohol consumption but frequently choose the “release of tension” offered by alcohol in order to ensure “easier conversation and socializing” (ibid) in large group settings. Parker and Williams’ (2003: 346) study of the “work hard-play hard” lifestyles of many young adults also concludes that although individuals are aware of an “inherent risk that some nights out will go very wrong” (ibid), their decisions to participate in “intoxicated weekends” (ibid) are based on perceived positive outcomes such as “being with friends, engaging in romantic/sexual encounters, parading, dancing, and experiencing altered states” (ibid:364) which frequently accompany heavy drinking and occasional drug use.

Also, in groups where underage drinkers are present, older participants justify purchasing alcohol for minors as an opportunity to bank
a future “return of favors” (Henry and Eaton 1999:92) from the younger participants, while the “‘risks of being caught are not enough to truly worry about’” (ibid:95). In groups where young people are new to drinking, buying alcohol for them is frequently regarded by members of the group as “morally responsible” (ibid:92) as it is considered a “process of learning” (ibid) about “how to become a socially responsible drinker” (ibid). Consequently, mass intoxication is a major contributing factor to riotous behavior although the initial decision to drink alcohol is made rationally.

The Frustration-Aggression Approach (Dollard and Miller 1950:84) also cites that frustrating personal situations lead to disorder if individual aggression has acquired a “learned reward value by association”. In situations where individuals experience heightened strain, the conditioned rewards offered with aggressive and destructive behavior, such as feelings of personal empowerment and autonomy suggest that rioting is a predictable outcome. Rosenfeld’s (1997:489) inquiry into the 1992 riot in Chicago following the Chicago Bulls’ national basketball championship victory found that the city-wide looting and rioting was not part of regular celebratory rituals. Instead, these outcomes were mainly a response to deep-rooted political injustices which were reopened following the police brutality of the 1991 Rodney King beating in California. Since King’s violent arrest was perceived by many as a racially-motivated hate crime, the offending officers’ subsequent acquittal led to an angered American public seeking an outlet for aggression that would provide a
rewarding sense of vengeance for inflicted subjugation (ibid). Furthermore, this study asserted that individuals lacking elite status and resources do in fact act rationally when voicing discrepancies, as the “most powerful political tool” (ibid: 497) that underprivileged populations have is “their ability to disrupt” (ibid) the dominant social order.

In other cases, individual members of groups that gather inside nightclubs often incite disorder at closing time as a response to the frustrations resulting from an “unfulfilled nightly aspiration they have yet to realize” (Rigakos 2006:9). Aggression in the form of fighting other patrons and club bouncers may- at that point in the night- offer rewards of partaking in a spectacle that was expected and desired but not otherwise realized.

**Responses to Social Control**

While rational choice models of the crowd prove that crowd members do indeed possess the capacity to make intelligent, self-interested decisions, they are no easier to control by police and outside authorities than when assumed to be motivated by irrationality or emotion. This may be due to the fact that rioters often “feel they have a ‘right’ to riot” (“Staying riot-free…”, November 24, 2003:para10).

Also, rational though deviant behaviour may stem from a general lack of social ties to the community. In these cases, individuals may experience a sense of hopelessness which Durkheim (1893) termed *anomie*. Under such circumstances, a person’s behaviour may be explained by “breakdown” theories of collective behaviour (Useem 1985,
which propose that disorderly crowd activity “results from social disorganization and increased levels of discontent” (Useem 1985: 677). Under this conception, the crowd assembly is centred around the psychological explanation of rootlessness and “alienation” proposed by Kornhauser (1959:237). As hopelessness emerges, these members of society are often considered to be “unattached” (ibid:229) in terms of social conformity and are therefore more impressionable and susceptible to crowd participation. This perspective claims societies which lack structured groups are likely to leave citizens with only vague social controls. For example, Useem (1985:682) argues that the New Mexico prison riot of 1980, which resulted in 33 inmate deaths, 400 injuries, and over $200 million U.S. in damages, was undoubtedly a product of elevated deprivation which led to undermined social controls within the prison. When job opportunities and recreational activities shown to “make riot participation less likely” (ibid:681) were discontinued after 1975, many inmates “perceived a dramatic worsening of conditions” (ibid) and began to demonstrate a lack organization and motivation. Without strong communal ties, these people were “attracted” (Kornhauser 1959:192) to causes “outside the established order” (ibid). Although a lack of inmate programs may not be responsible for sparking all prison riots, “shortcomings in the treatment of prisoners” (Zellick 1978:77), which also contributes to social breakdown, is cited as a commonality in prison riot studies.
Also, rational crowds are not devoid of appeals for order; in riotous situations, many individuals near the scene of disorder “remain passive bystanders” (Lang and Lang 1970:101), some “hide indoors to avoid danger” (ibid), and others even attempt intervention to “stop or contain the disorder” (ibid). However, in cases like the Kingston Penitentiary riot of 1971, many participants felt that non-participation in a riot would result in harsher repercussions from other inmates than would the punishments threatened by conventional authoritative and legal systems. Desroches’ (1972:14) study of the inmate riot in Kingston reveals that pressure and fear of bodily harm from fellow prisoners caused many “reluctant” (ibid) inmates “who wanted no part” (ibid) of the riot to give in and participate in some form or another if they could not first find a place to hide. This riot did exhibit rational action, as crowd leaders forbade beatings of the guards and limited violent acts specifically to the prisoners of cell 1-D, which held child molesters, sex offenders and informants. These prisoners, normally “shunned and despised by other prisoners” (ibid:17), were rounded up and beaten, burned and tortured by those who felt violence against these “diddlers” (ibid) and “rats” (ibid) was justified.

The view that crowd members are not irrational but logical and competent is also exhibited through the pre-emptive measures taken in 1992 by store owners in Los Angeles during the street riots characterized by racial conflict. Shop owners appealed to the rationalities of rioters by placing signs in their store windows reading “‘Black owned businesses’” (“Scenes from a riot”, 1992:26) in hopes of deterring riotous destruction.
and looting in the name of avenging Rodney King’s death. Individuals who consciously pass up the opportunity to engage in disorderly behavior are self-regulating and demonstrate that an adherence to normal social controls is not confined to behavior outside of crowds. Therefore, rational choice theories contend that riot control can only be enforced by detaining and removing specific agitators and deviants from the crowd.

Kelling and Wilson’s (1982) Broken Windows theory, which employs the logic of rational choice theories, highlights the role of surveillance and property maintenance in preventing public disorder from spiralling out of control. Using the analogy of “broken windows” in run-down neighborhoods, Kelling and Wilson (1982:para11) propose that radical, non-normative behavior is often preceded by social disorder which occurs in a “developmental sequence: if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken; one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing”. This account may in fact explain the succession of a crowd’s deviant acts such as looting, littering, and other criminal activities. Furthermore, riots usually take place on public property and are therefore more likely to result in uninhibited acts of destruction that may seem harmless because no one in the crowd “owns” (Kelling and Coles 1996:238) the resulting damages. When citizens themselves are seen defending the maintenance of public areas by defining “neighborhood standards for behavior” (ibid:243), destruction from crime and rioting usually decreases. Therefore, this exemplifies that rationally acting crowd
members are less likely to incur damages to property that is not already in disarray.

Although police officers may succeed in controlling the rational crowd, their presence may also decrease the effectiveness of the natural social controls that function when individuals regulate each other. In fact, in many groups, actions which go against the crowd’s perceived acceptable norms of the event are largely condemned by fellow crowd members as they actually “dampen” (Turner and Killian 1972:25) the overall mood. However, with police officers present, crowd participants may feel less responsibility to control fellow members of the crowd. Kelling and Wilson (1982:para46) also observe that ordinary citizens are not “likely to feel the sense of responsibility that wearing a badge confers”, which therefore “reduces the chance of any one person acting as an agent of the community” (ibid).

Furthermore, according to Kelling and Wilson (1982), arresting certain members of the crowd may actually amplify resistance and outrage the crowd. Particularly when members of a crowd feel their political rights have been revoked, crowd violence is a likely outcome (Berk 1974:51). First of all, those who do not see their behavior as offensive interpret “the use of force by police as provocative and offensive” (Lang and Lang 1970:98). Members of the rational crowd may then become overly sympathetic to the excessive police sanctions because they are likely to “identify themselves with the victim of the action” (ibid). Crowd members may also argue that police officers unnecessarily take advantage of
boundless authority, which then allows crowd participants to justify retaliation as a logical response (ibid).

When attempting to regain order in the rational crowd, Raiffa (1982:8) asserts that discrepancies can only be “efficiently reconciled” through negotiations between the different parties involved. Mediators and arbitrators must communicate requests clearly and propose compromises in order to effectively locate and control the rowdy participants. However, when police officers do not attempt to appeal to the rationality of crowd members, the officers must be cautious not to appear too relaxed in the face of a riot since some studies have shown that police officers who turn a blind eye to crowd disorder appear to excuse and even endorse violent behavior, which then redefines the level of tolerance for rowdy behaviour inside the crowd (Lang and Lang 1970:105). Under the rational model of crowd behaviour, deterring potential crowd members from attending events and from committing destructive acts can only be achieved by ensuring the presence of social controls which render larger potential costs than rewards for crowd participation.

In conclusion, rational choice theories construct explanations for crowd participation, the crowd’s dynamic, its shift to unruliness, and its reactions to forces of social control which are rooted in individual’s free will and desire to maximize pleasure while minimizing pain. While these theoretical interpretations account for the diverse motives and behaviours which exist inside large gatherings, this line of reasoning denies any influence of the crowd’s atmosphere on individual action. Since claims that
individuals behave no differently in crowd settings than they would exterior to the crowd have been undermined by empirical evidence (Ohio State University 2003a:34), rational choice theories do not provide comprehensive explanations for crowd behaviour. Furthermore, rational choice explanations, like contagion and normative theories, also provide an independently incomplete story of the crowd event since they can only account for specific actions of crowd members after-the-fact.

EVENT-CENTRED THEORIES OF THE RIOT

New developments in the field of collective behavior have persuaded theorists to look past “the old sociological saws about structural strain, hostile beliefs and deprivation-frustration-aggression” (McPhail 1994:26) and strive to create a more comprehensive explanatory framework for crowd behavior. Theories which analyze situational factors as well as a broader range of stages encompassing the disturbance are more likely to provide a thorough explanation of riots as events. Accordingly, these “event-centred” theories not only take into account individual motives, choices, and actions at the scene of the gathering, but these theories also provide inclusive frameworks which deem the crowd phenomenon a progressive “event” shaped by many interconnected factors. Event-centred crowd theories are likely to follow the basic framework of the “social event” provided by Sacco and Kennedy (2002:61), which calls for an examination of previously overlooked “predisposing conditions” and situational factors that exist throughout the crowd’s entire developmental process. McPhail (1994) also offers a similar event-centred
prescription for riot analysis that recommends a chronological breakdown of the interactive processes that precede, occur during and follow the crowd’s formation. In a different way, Smelser’s (1962) Value-Added theory of collective behavior also conceives of the riot as an event that can only occur after the build-up of a number of primary and secondary factors. Event-centred frameworks are not limited to theorizing the surface behavior observed during the riot, but instead these theories explain the crowd dynamic as a situational product resulting from both the combination of specific interactions and various social control factors. The framework of these theories allows for an inclusive account of each riot event, which begins prior to and continues long after the actual riot itself.

**RIOT AS SOCIAL EVENT**

Sacco and Kennedy (2002) provide an event-centred framework for crime analysis that is equally applicable to crowd behaviour. This approach calls for the breakdown of the criminal event into three phases: precursors, transactions, and the elements of aftermath. In this view, theorizing a criminal event undoubtedly requires “reference to the lawbreaker” (Sacco and Kennedy 2008:34), but also necessitates thorough examination of the “physical and social settings” (ibid) in which the crime occurs. So in the case of a typical crime, we must not only investigate the actions and reactions of offenders, but also those of the victims, the bystanders, the police officers, the media, and the public. For example, the presence and negative reactions of witnesses at a crime scene may act as a deterrent for offenders, while in other cases, bystander silence or non-reaction may
actually encourage the commission of a crime. In the long-term, criminal events are also shaped by members of the public and legal policy makers. Oftentimes, members of the public attribute criminal activity to the failure of public security measures, which then results in “pressure on police to pursue more aggressively some categories of offenders” (ibid). Essentially, the multitude of actions and roles played in and contributing to each criminal event supports the notion that crimes are generally more complex than individual acts, and can in fact be conceived as social events which are shaped by many factors.

Precursors

In order to analyze a crowd disturbance under this framework, the event’s precursors must first be examined. These factors consist of pre-set conditions which increase the chances that a riot will occur, such as the prior “relationship between participants, the interpretation of the harmfulness of the acts, the anticipated responses to certain behavior, [and] the nature of the location” (ibid: 60).

Transactions

The second stage of interpretation occurs at the site of the event. This calls for an analysis of the personal interaction and action which occurs among individuals and among clusters of individuals. This stage of interpretation draws attention to the patterns of assembly, the division of labour and the responses to social control measures which emerge during the temporary gathering.
Furthermore, transactions necessitate viewing the riot event “not in isolation” (ibid), but instead as one of many similar incidents. By categorizing the riot as one among many similar occurrences, it is possible to see how some actors may even “rationalize their behavior as something other than criminal” (ibid:63). Thus, Sacco and Kennedy’s framework of the social event calls for the assessment of the event’s transactions in the greater context of the participants’ prior understanding of the rules and behavioural expectations and subsequent discernment of whether or not they apply to the particular situation.

Aftermath

In one sense, the analysis of the aftermath of riots is important in any attempt to discover their causes. In this respect, it is reasonable to ask if a riot’s aftermath- in particular the action by police and other agents of social control- will subsequently “deter a repeat occurrence” (Sacco and Kennedy 2008:64). In a study of collective violence and the factors which increase its diffusion, Myers (2000:199) also argues that riots are too often treated “as independent from one another”, which often segregates analyses which could inform an assessment of the effects of previous riots events on future ones. Accordingly, post-riot media broadcasts and resulting public reactions either “increase (by spurring imitation) or decrease (by spurring repression) future collective acts of the same nature” (ibid). Therefore, when many similar riot events occur in the same context, each event is best understood as one incident in a “series of interdependent events” that contributes to or aids in repressing a riot “wave” (ibid:175).
RIOT PROCESSES

McPhail’s (1994) work on crowd theory also persuades readers to look beyond the traditional boundaries of contagion, emergent-norm and rational choice theories when attempting to explain crowd behavior. McPhail (1994:11) casts doubt on such individual-centred theoretical explanations, claiming there is “seldom any single purpose for all riot participants” (ibid); instead, there are infinitely varied “purposes for assembling” (ibid) that can only be accounted for by using an event-centred model. Such a theory breaks the crowd processes into “smaller and more manageable pieces” (ibid) that can then be tackled one at a time or in certain groupings. McPhail recommends an analysis of the crowd that recognizes three event stages: the assembling processes, riot area activities, and dispersal processes. This breakdown is particularly important because it helps to explain how the crowd’s shape changes significantly with the introduction of certain factors which arise at each stage of the process.

Assembling Processes

Firstly, the assembling processes require an examination of the circumstances which lead certain people to the riot area “compared with those which keep others away” (McPhail 1994: 12). McPhail and others (Kenny et al. 2001:14) assert that assembling processes are either “impromptu” or organized in advance. Either way, both types of assemblies require the circulation of messages regarding the event details in order to facilitate a gathering. The major difference between impromptu
and pre-planned gatherings, however, is that pre-organized assembly plans tend to originate from one common source and this source often supplies rationalization for the gathering.

Predicting who is likely to gather at an event that turns riotous requires assessing the social role of communicative networks which transmit instructions for assembly, examining the facility of carrying out these instructions, and determining the availability of admittance to the site of the gathering. Research indicates that events which are planned well in advance and offer repeated and widespread instructions are more likely to draw large groups of people who must arrange transportation and acquire certain resources, such as tickets, alcohol, megaphones or other props in advance of the event (Kenny et al. 2001:14).

Furthermore, depending on the information disseminated to the public, mass media “communication networks” (Myers 2000:201) act to both deter and attract crowd members. Accordingly, if potential crowd participants “never receive information about others’ previous behavior, they can never evaluate its outcomes or imitate it” (ibid). When information concerning a crowd event is disseminated without detailing previous sanctions and negative aspects of a previous event’s aftermath, it is unlikely to act as a deterrent. This explains why the intended purposes of media attention leading up to a riot event—“an effort to deter bad behavior” (McPhail 1994:12) may instead unintentionally attract disorderly crowd participants as well.
Riot Area Activities

The riot area activities then must be examined in isolation from the assembling processes in order to determine the “range of individual and collective” (ibid:7) behavior that occurs once the crowd has been formed. As an alternative to “stimulus-response” (ibid:12) explanations, McPhail suggests using Powers’ Perception Control theory in order to account for behavior at this stage of crowd analysis. This requires examining “interaction processes” (ibid:16) within the crowd where individuals translate purposes into actions by making their “perceptions match their objectives” (ibid). This theoretical interpretation accounts for the varied individual and collective actions of crowd members acting under similar generalized beliefs, and explains why the “connected actors” (Myers 2000:200) in a crowd event “do not all have the same influence on each other and are not all influenced the same way” (ibid). Theories which focus on interaction within the crowd assert that crowd members may occasionally engage in collective actions within the crowd; however, such acts result from participants’ conscious responses to cues for such opportunities within the crowd. Furthermore, this stage of analysis allows for a variety of individual “justifications” (ibid:12) and explanations for behavior within the crowd since there is “rarely if ever a single, mutually inclusive, motive for participation in any riot” (ibid).

Dispersal Processes

Finally, McPhail states the importance of examining the dispersal processes of the riot event. Similar to Sacco and Kennedy’s (2008)
analysis of the aftermath of an event, these processes focus specifically on
the immediate chain of events that occur as the crowd disperses. In the
case of pre-planned gatherings, the standard instructions for dispersal may
be disseminated in advance. In such cases, participants may even leave and
come back to the event or may organize their arrival and dispersal times
around “routine personal needs” (Kenny et al. 2001:16) including working,
eating and sleeping. In addition to routine dispersing processes, participant
dispersal can also follow an emergency or a coerced basis. Therefore, riot
events are often hard to predict from start to end, since determining exactly
how, when, and why people leave the riot area is “largely situational”
(ibid). By breaking down riot events into three components, assembling
processes, riot area activities, and dispersal processes, McPhail’s
framework facilitates a thorough explanation of crowd behaviour in
alignment with certain situational factors and predisposing crowd
conditions.

VALUE-ADDED THEORY

Smelser’s (1962) model of collective behavior also conceives of
riots as events which require a more complex analysis than theories of
contagion, norms, and rational action can provide. Smelser’s Value-Added
framework focuses on explaining behaviour as it is influenced by factors
which combine over time. This theoretical framework requires an analysis
of five main components of the riot event: conditions of structural
conduciveness, structural strain, generalized beliefs, mobilization for
action, and social control. A precipitating event can be considered
autonomously as a sixth element, but here it will be treated as a subcategory of the examination of a generalized belief.

Crossley’s (2002:688) analysis of the 1999 Woodstock riot uses a form of Smelser’s model to describe the event as a “process” that can only be explained by examining a multitude of sequential factors: “strains, definitions, triggers, opportunities and resources” (ibid). Smelser’s Value-Added framework, which is also employed in Lewis and Kelsey’s (1994) study of the 1989 “crowd crush” (ibid) at Hillsborough, necessarily “emerges out of the interaction of these factors, not on account of any one of them alone” (ibid). Ultimately, this model enables a comprehensive account of a riot event since each of Smelser’s categories focus on primary and secondary factors which, in combination, explain the crowd’s formation and the riot as a complex event, as opposed to a series of individuated actions.

**Structural Conduciveness**

Elements of structural conduciveness, physical and social conditions which predispose a specific area and a certain group of people to host and attend a gathering, define the event and public expectations of the event long before the crowd is formed. Specific conditions of structural conduciveness, such as an event’s location and crowd members’ access to the location, lighting at the site, timing of the event, forecasted weather, availability of alcohol, and the presence and extent of supervision, will either facilitate or inhibit the organization of an event and mobilization of a large number of people. Since “most delinquent acts are committed in
groups rather than by individuals” (Sacco and Kennedy 2002:40), those who are drawn to the event in hopes of causing trouble are more likely to attend if the event’s planned location encompasses a large space and is expected to draw many spectators. These elements of structural conduciveness can be conceived of, under Smelser’s value-added model, as factors which ultimately contribute to an event’s success or failure in terms of drawing a crowd.

**Structural Strain**

Strain often precedes the event in addition to being present once the crowd has formed. Structural strain results from the breakdown of social relations and often takes the shape of “ambiguity” (Lewis and Kelsey 1994:192) resulting from “anxiety generated from uncertainty” (ibid). Inconsistencies in the normative system between perceived standards and realities leads to a strain in behavioral expectations. As far as the Queen’s Homecoming Aberdeen party could be conceived of as a “defense of an established tradition and student privilege to crowd a short, narrow street called Aberdeen on one night of the year” (Zarnett 2005:para2), strain expresses “a relation between an event or situation and certain cultural and individual standards” (Smelser 1962:51). This strain may force individuals to take sides and “create the image of the common ‘enemy’” (Momboisse 1967:33), which in the case of the Queen’s Homecoming disturbances would be those university officials, Kingston residents, and police officers attempting to remove the “right” to celebration.
Also, strain in the form of “ambiguity about whether or not access to the event will be possible” (Lewis and Kelsey 1994:192) may have been responsible for the high incidence of students accessing such street parties by jumping fences and cutting through backyards. In the case of the “crowd crush” at Hillsborough, strain experienced by hopeful participants who were fenced out of the stadium contributed to the eventual riot (ibid:201). The strain produced by the guards’ heavy-handed denial of entry led to the pushing and charging of crowd members which then forced the guards to open the stadium’s gates; therefore, the guards’ “repressive force” (Myers 2000:202) eventually increased the “severity” (ibid) of the riot.

In addition to predisposing strains, both spontaneous and expected strains may arise during the riot area activities, forcing participants to both plan in advance and react on the spot. McPhail’s (1994) use of Perception Control theory to explain the emergence of outcome violence at gatherings which become disturbances can be further applied to theorize the nature of socially-structured strain at these events. Many events which become riotous originally involve drinking and drinking games; therefore, strains sometimes emerge with the absence or lack of access to alcohol. Furthermore, tickets allocated for liquor violations at large gatherings often elevates the strain on the relationship between police or the event’s authoritative figures and crowd participants. Since one major “non-violent” (Buettner 2004:45) goal at primarily student-attended events often involves consuming excessive amounts of alcohol to demonstrate an ability to party
“‘hard’” (ibid), Perception Control theory contends that students may orient their behaviour toward the use of alcohol and may react violently to what they see as unwarranted attempts by authorities to control their behaviour. This strain is an important factor in shifting the event from celebration “based on a positive wish-fulfilment belief” (Smelser 1962:171) to hostility and defiance. Thus, the examination of structural strain, which exists in many forms, is essential in determining how a gathering becomes an unruly event with potentially grave consequences.

**Generalized Belief**

The Value-Added theory also tracks a generalized belief among crowd members, which is ascertained at the site of the riot, as participants begin to define the situation and spread prescriptions for individual behavior throughout the crowd. An analysis of generalized beliefs may also reveal that although many differing perceptions of the event may exist among crowd members, many people may have adjusted their perspectives to allow for specific responsive actions, as explained by the Perception Control Theory (Powers cited in McPhail 1994:12). For example, when a general dislike for public authority figures exists prior to a riot event, crowd members tend to exhibit heightened responses of resistance and retaliation during the disturbance. In one case, generalized beliefs concerning an unjust dispensation of goods and civil rights led many poor rioters in Chicago to “recover a part of what they believe is their due” (Rosenfeld 1997: 497) even though it meant destroying property and stealing from those who were no better off than themselves.
Smelser’s model of collective behavior contends that these generalized beliefs not only affect the crowd members’ perceptions of the event, but also shape their reactions to precipitating or trigger events at the gathering. Essentially, sentiments that participants harbor prior to the crowd formation may be further cultivated by the spread of rumors and eventually expressed following precipitating incidents—those influential acts which spark a change in the gathering’s atmosphere and often provoke emotional outbursts and defiant responses among crowd members. In many cases, perceptions of such incidents are often accompanied by feelings of “relative deprivation” (Rose 1982:77) that result from “comparing reality against some standard of what they feel that reality should be” (ibid). For example, the disturbances at the 1999 Woodstock festival followed the disappointment arising from false promises of a surprise guest at the concert’s finale. At the end of the festival, crowd members’ shared beliefs of entitlement to a “real” (Vider 2004:144) surprise performer led to extreme disappointment following the discovery that the “surprise” (ibid) crowd members had been patiently awaiting all weekend was no more than a showing of the 1969 Jimi Hendrix performance projected onto screens onstage. Spoiled hopes may have incited the subsequent crowd disorder, which comprised of overturning a car, vast looting of vendors, the destruction of ATM machines onsite, and the setting of fires which spread throughout the concert and campgrounds. Ultimately, the value-added model proposes that the existence of generalized beliefs among crowd members does not necessitate a riotous
outcome; however, the nature of such shared beliefs will determine crowd members’ motivated responses to precipitating events, which may then lead to the development of a riotous gathering.

Mobilization for Action

Smelser’s Value-added model cites the mobilization for action as an important set of steps taken to organize potential crowd members and make public the resources required for attendance at the event. The crowd’s organization begins prior to the event, when the location is chosen and set up in advance, supplies are purchased, necessary transportation is arranged and details of the event are made public through mainstream media sources, word of mouth, and alternative media such as the internet. In the case of the 1970 Kent State University demonstration, factors including a lack of daytime student responsibilities (especially after classes had been cancelled due to the university administration’s fear of an escalating hostile event), participants’ proximity to the location (on campus) and the available student networks for communication (classes, prior to cancellation) enabled nearly unobstructed student mobilization for action (Lewis 1972).

Conversely, blocked access to resources for mobilization will decrease attendance at an event. In cases such as out-of-town G8 summits, sports matches or infamous parties which require increased planning and access to financial means for lodging and transportation, attendance may often be limited to local participants who are not weighed down with heavy external familial and occupational responsibilities. An analysis of
the mobilization for action performed prior to and during a gathering reveals the importance of this stage in determining the magnitude of the event by ensuring that the required details and resources are widely communicated and accessible to potential participants.

**Social Control Factors**

Finally, the Value-Added model of collective behaviour requires an analysis of the social control factors present during each stage of the riot event. Elements of social control must be assessed before, during, and after the crowd formation in order to determine which measures facilitate a riot as well as which controls prevent or decrease the likelihood of a crowd’s transformation to riot. The course of an event is shaped by both pre-emptive and reactive measures performed by a variety of public authorities and community leaders. Smelser’s model focuses on the social controls applied in three areas: normative regulation, leadership, and information (Smelser 1962:218-9). Therefore, when the dominant social control agents of a community, such as police officers and other city officials, cannot succeed in shaping crowd members’ norms, in controlling the crowd’s leaders, or in informing the crowd members of potentially negative event outcomes and sanctions, the chances of preventing a gathering or of exerting influence at any stage of the event’s duration are unlikely.

Lewis and Kelsey (1994:204) also argue the importance of the presence of a variety of social control measures, including peer influence, at all stages of an event in order to prevent a riotous outcome. In the case of the Hillsborough football riot, peer-oriented social controls appear to
have been more effective in shaping behaviour than tactical control measures taken by police officers: “Having peers not interested in the match could influence the decision as could the perceived image of a strong regulating police force determined to prevent people without tickets from gaining access to the stadium grounds” (ibid).

As for police officers’ tactics at these events, leadership is extremely important since delayed reactions to the event may instill public doubt concerning the police force’s authority (Rose 1982:109). The Hillsborough crowd crush exemplifies how the police officers’ inability to control the crowd outside the football match incited pandemonium and a subsequent tragedy (Lewis and Kelsey 1994:194-5). Following the event, people may have perceived the police’s early inability to prevent the crowd’s boisterousness, which led to the officers’ decision to open the front gates, as a sign of tactical failure.

However, on the other hand, heavy police repression does not ensure the dispersal of a crowd; some studies show that zero-tolerance police techniques actually increase the chances of a crowd becoming riotous (Myers 2000:202), particularly in cases of celebratory gatherings which “lack any formal social structure among participants” (McCarthy et al. 2005:31). In these cases, repressive police responses to disorderly crowd behavior may deter future participation in similar incidents (Myers 2000:202); however, it is unlikely that crowds without a distinct demand and or a designated leader can be easily disseminated with threats of violence or appeals for negotiation (McCarthy et al. 2005:31).
Finally, the dissemination of public information prior to riot events is often ineffective as a deterrent of crowd participation (Ruddell et al. 2005:556). Details concerning serious sanctions for participation in a riot are often underreported and leave many people unsure about or completely unaware of the potential consequences for attending an event. Furthermore, many people join a crowd without an expectation that mere participation will result in sanctions (Lewis 1972:92-3); therefore, participants do not factor in potential personal costs (Raiffa in Berk 1974:59) when deciding whether or not to attend an event. Therefore, the Value-Added theory supports the argument that social controls must be carefully balanced and tailored to specific events since implementing a variety of social control measures in order to prevent riotous gatherings will not necessarily guarantee successful deterrence.

Overall, the Value-Added model provides the framework for a thorough account of crowd behaviour. By assessing the location’s structural conduciveness to the specific event, possible sources of strain among crowd members, generalized beliefs shared by crowd members, precipitating events which emerge at the event, steps taken and resources afforded to the crowd for purposes of mobilization, and the presence and lack of particular forces of social control, we are able to formulate a comprehensive report of the event and further construct a theoretical argument outlining specific factors which may lead an event to become riotous.
CONCLUSIONS

This chapter explores a variety of specific gatherings and theoretical interpretations in order to establish what is known and what is not known about crowds, crowd behaviour and riotous gatherings. Firstly, this chapter examines individual-centred theories of crowd behaviour which provide explanations for individual action rooted in forces of contagion, norms, and rational choices. On the other hand, this chapter also investigates the line of reasoning displayed in event-centred theories, which inherently argue that crowd action is a social product that cannot be explained without first examining a number of contributing factors which subsequently shape the specific nature of each event.

While this chapter provides many explanations for the processes of a crowd’s assembly, its dynamic, its shift to unruliness and its responses to forces of social control, it also debunks many commonly held assumptions of crowd behaviour. Ultimately, while individual-centred theories are useful in clarifying the behaviour of crowd members post-gathering, these theories are unreliable in predicting crowd behaviour prior to the event and they also fail to examine the influence of specific social conditions on crowd behaviour. This chapter concludes that only event-centred theories, such as Sacco and Kennedy’s conception of the “social event”, McPhail’s “riot processes”, and Smelser’s Value-Added theory, provide a comprehensive working framework which can be used to fully understand the complex social psychology of crowd behaviour.
CHAPTER THREE: THE EVOLUTION OF DISORDERLY STUDENT GATHERINGS

A central theme of this chapter is that there is nothing atypical about the 2005 Queen’s Homecoming riot on Aberdeen Street. Firstly, this chapter aims to illustrate that the Homecoming event of 2005 exemplifies a relatively new phenomenon of student celebratory rioting currently observed across North America. Furthermore, this chapter reveals that the 2005 disturbance also reflects a long-standing practice of local partying in the largely student-populated neighbourhoods bordering the university campus in Kingston, Ontario. I also examine the deep-seated history and evolution of student unrest, which has taken various forms over the years.

In order to describe the 2005 Aberdeen Street event, this chapter then outlines this event’s media build-up, initial planning and the actual incidents which took place on Saturday night of the Homecoming celebrations. Following this story, the chapter discusses comparable American occurrences and then compares the Aberdeen case to a similar event which took place in November 2002 in Columbus, Ohio. This chapter further links these two cases through common interpretations and possible explanations of the crowd assembly, the crowd atmosphere, and the shift from crowd to riot at each of these events using individual- and event-based theories of crowd behaviour. Lastly, this chapter summarizes the research findings of the 2003 Ohio State University Task Force on Preventing Celebratory Riots. To this end, the Aberdeen Street event
established is contextualized among many similar incidents recorded in Columbus and in university and college towns across the United States.

**THE PHENOMENON OF ** **“CELEBRATORY RIOTS”**

The rowdy 2005 student disturbance, which took place on Saturday, September 24th and into the morning of Sunday the 25th on Aberdeen Street and which drew over 5,000 would-be rioters and spectators, ultimately exemplifies the growing trend of student celebratory riots characterized by “expressive outbursts which occasionally accompany victory celebrations or ritualized festivals” (Marx 1970:26). In the United States alone, at least 19 university neighbourhoods have experienced celebratory riots since 1985 (Ohio State University 2003a:30), with disturbances continually growing in density and estimated damages.

Although the available literature provides no systematic account of Canadian celebratory riots, it was possible to trace the history of student disturbances at Queen’s University back to the 1960’s using records from the *Kingston Whig-Standard* and the *Queen’s Journal* and other archival sources. Historically, student parties in the Queen’s neighbourhoods have in fact played host to rowdiness for decades. Queen’s gatherings have also exhibited “the element of fun, kicks, the quest for excitement, and a general expressiveness” (Marx 1970:27) in the midst of a “championship game, a natural urban gathering place, large groups of young males, [and] alcohol” (Gilyard 2003a:para2) - all factors characteristic to emergent celebratory rioting.
STUDENT UNREST OVER THE YEARS

Student rioting is not a new phenomenon; however, its shape and means of expression have changed considerably over the years. Evidence of student unrest leading to protesting and rioting dates back to Ancient Greece (University of New Hampshire 2003a) and is first recognized in the United States in the late 18th century when Harvard students organized riots “against bad food” (Schweingruber 2005:5) and in support of the American Revolution. In the 19th century, students in the United States found more cause for rioting; they protested in loco parentis and compulsory military training. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, student unrest in North America often embodied the “widespread protest regarding the Vietnam War and civil rights” (ibid; Flacks 1970) and other significant political issues.

In the United States, perhaps the most infamous student protest took place in 1970 at Kent State University. As discussed, the National Guard was summoned to control a Vietnam war protest and the confrontation between students and the riot police resulted in four student fatalities (Lewis 1972a, 1972b; Rudwick and Meier 1972). In Canada, the most notable protest-related student riot, now known as the Computer Riot, occurred at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University) in February of 1969 when an angry crowd of students organized to protest a professor accused of racism. The protest quickly became riotous and subsequent fire setting on campus resulted in the loss of extensive
While most studies during this period characterized instances of student unrest as largely political and rooted in protest, Marx (1970) discovered that contemporary riotous crowds were not always issue-related. In fact, in many instances, “protest, ideology, and grievance” (Marx 1970:1) were “relatively absent” (ibid) from riot events. More than two decades after the era associated with anti-war protest has passed, student riots have become predominantly non-protest related. Contemporary disturbances, which are largely celebratory in nature, often coincide with important sporting matches, festivals and holidays, and have recently been termed a “‘nationwide problem’” (Gilyard 2003a:para5).

THE HISTORY OF QUEEN’S HOMECOMING AND SIMILAR STUDENT DISRUPTIONS

The celebratory riot of 2005 followed previous Queen’s student party patterns and general American campus riot trends that have seen gradual, but noticeable increases in the size of and damages yielded by student parties in the last 20 years (University of New Hampshire 2003a). The incidents observed at the Aberdeen Street party were not typical for all weekend celebrations in Kingston, but did transpire predictably on this particular fall weekend associated with Homecoming, which for the past few years has been overcrowded, anticipated for months in advance, and consistently attended by more partygoers than any other night of the year. While smaller-scale sporadic gatherings now take place on Aberdeen Street year-round (“Students went too far, police say.” May 1, 2006), the
The Queen’s Homecoming weekend, known as “Reunion Weekend” (Malcolm and Dawe 1994:21) until the 1950’s, began to draw large groups of alumni to the university as early as the beginning of the 19th century. Traditionally, this weekend corresponds with a Queen’s football game played against the team’s longstanding rivals. After the Homecoming football game, off-campus student parties are typical and celebrations are “notorious for rowdy behaviour among students, younger alumni, and visitors from other universities and around Kingston” (ibid). Particularly on this specific weekend, “large, unruly University Avenue street parties” (Ross 2005:2) were commonly observed in the 1980’s, and even then, subsequent media coverage insured prompt action on the part of
Kingston police and university officials attempting to control the disturbances. In the 1990’s, Queen’s students began to advertise and throw large house parties in the student ghetto with loud music and the illegal sale of draft beer, either by the cup or by an all-you-can-drink flat rate. These “keg parties”, which attracted sizeable crowds, led to consistent public complaints about “noise, vandalism, and obnoxious student behaviour coinciding with official University activities” (Ross 2005:3) over the years leading up to the publicized Aberdeen Homecoming disturbances of 2005.

Homecoming parties which once took place on University Avenue testify to the common nature of student party riots over the last few decades. Even in the 1960’s, Queen’s students boasted skills in “participating in disturbances” (Riddick 1964:2) and “leading riots”, which, not surprisingly, led to the 1964 creation of a “Town Gown Committee” (“AMS Capitulates with Community”, October 23, 1964:1) aimed at improving the shaky relations between the Kingston community and Queen’s students. Subsequent steps taken may have quieted parties temporarily, but the rowdy parties re-emerged over time. Noise by-law violations, property damages and underage drinking once again became visibly problematic in 1981 at a “street party attended by an estimated 3,000 people” (Polzer 1981:1) described by then Deputy Police Chief William Hackett as “‘the worst mob [he had] seen in 30 years on the force’” (“Queen’s student gets probation…”, November 17, 1981:16).

After the 1981 street party on University Avenue, where participants were
seen “throwing beer bottles, using foul language, [and] urinating on private property” (ibid), City Hall commanded the formation of another committee “struck to deal with ‘town-gown’ relations” (ibid).

Furthermore, although Homecoming celebrations have been traditional at Queen’s over the decades, recent claims that Homecoming parties have always occurred in the current celebratory fashion probably reflect “the institutional memory of the college population” (Ruddell et al. 2005:554), which typically “runs in four- or five-year cycles”. Thus, many current Queen’s students may genuinely feel that the Aberdeen Street party is central to their understanding of the Queen’s University experience.

QUEEN’S HOMECOMING 2005 EVENT PRECURSORS

Media Build-Up

The 2005 Aberdeen Street party began well before Homecoming weekend as multiple precursors (Sacco and Kennedy 2008:32), including the media’s pre-coverage of the event and increased public anticipation and curiosity surrounding the party, may have actually led to a heightened attendance during the assembling processes (McPhail 1994:12). Like most celebratory riots, the event on Aberdeen Street followed a heavy media build-up outlining past disorderly events, predicting possible outcomes for the anticipated event, and sometimes even using threats to deter attendance by potential participants and spectators. Such precursory action heightened the likelihood of a student riot occurring, as public threats created, among students who felt entitled to party, a sense of strain central to Smelser’s (1962) Value-Added theory of the riot.
During the weeks leading up to the 2005 Homecoming weekend, the event’s “newsworthiness” (Myers 2000:201) skyrocketed due to the unprecedented magnitude of the “out of control” (Armstrong 2005a:para4) 2004 Homecoming street party attended by over 5,000 people. The *Kingston Whig-Standard*’s pre-coverage of the 2005 Homecoming weekend mirrored an expectation that this event would recur and may even surpass the 2004 party in terms of rowdiness and destruction. This news source, aimed primarily at non-student residents of Kingston, intensified public hostility towards Queen’s students, particularly in the days leading up to the Homecoming weekend. Contrary to this depiction, the Queen’s *Journal* printed articles referencing the “beloved Aberdeen street party” (Summers 2005:para1), which may have raised expectations among student groups. This student publication may have actually convinced more people to “catch a little Aberdeen action” (ibid:2) than to avoid the party.

Furthermore, an assessment of the 2004 event, which drew thousands of partygoers to Aberdeen Street and resulted in an unparalleled number of arrests, prompted the Queen’s AMS to display posters and air local radio advertisements intended as warnings to dissuade partygoers from attending the 2005 Homecoming street party. Described by some as “condescending” (“AMS ad campaign ineffective”, September 23, 2005:para3) and by others an “elaborate intimidation campaign” (Poirier 2005:para1), these notices were for the most part ignored. In fact, they may have also encouraged the attendance of anyone looking to cause trouble, as
well as those merely curious to catch a glimpse of what might happen. Overall, the media build-up to the Homecoming event did not decrease the party’s attendance; instead, lead-up coverage of the anticipated street party may have actually aided in the promotion of the event.

**Initial Planning**

Despite “a year of planning and massive police presence” (Armstrong 2005:1) intended to prevent a recurrence of the 2004 Homecoming party, the 2005 event drew a larger crowd and rendered increased damages to public and private property. The Aberdeen Street party was “not completely spontaneous” (Madensen and Eck 2006:4) and involved planning from those “hosting” as well as those trying to prevent the party. According to event-centred theories of the riot, precursors (Sacco and Kennedy 2008) to the assembling processes (McPhail 1994) included continued Homecoming planning, public speculation of a potential event on Aberdeen Street, an atmosphere conducive (Smelser 1962) to intoxication, strains (ibid) imposed on students wishing to celebrate, and a lack of social control (ibid) tactics.

Although the 2004 Homecoming weekend caused massive public commotion, plans for the 2005 event were not cancelled. Queen’s administrators continued to plan and publicize a schedule of sanctioned events for the weekend, including an “elaborate free concert with top bands in the heart of campus” (Macmillan 2005:para10) intended to “counter the drive by students to create their own party” (Armstrong 2005a:para8); however, word of mouth and heavy cellular phone
interaction (Sacco 2006a:3) undoubtedly confirmed and promoted the unsanctioned Aberdeen Street party.

Largely mythologized in media sources such as Maclean’s magazine, the Queen’s Homecoming party is comparable to a holiday since the event is perceived by many students to be “accompanied by societal signals that the typical rules do not apply” (Buettner 2004:172). Subsequently, new students anticipate a street party with relaxed liquor laws and behavioural repercussions. Furthermore, many students feel pressured to publicly exhibit overindulgence in celebratory behaviours: “It is true that Queen's is equally famous for the drunken excesses of its homecoming weekends and its first-year orientation rituals, although these are usually passed off as part of the famous ‘Queen's spirit’ commented on even by the Canadian Encyclopedia” (Dickie 1990:para4). Subsequently, the consumption of alcohol throughout the day in combination with a series of early evening “small front-yard parties” (Armstrong 2005:1) provides an atmosphere conducive to lowered inhibitions and rowdy behaviour.

Just as university officials had anticipated a potential riot and attempted to prevent attendance at Aberdeen, the spokespersons from the Kingston Police Force also predicted a repeat of the 2004 party and tried to prevent another large disturbance. Police presence was enhanced by officers working overtime due to expectations that the Aberdeen party would get out of hand; however, the force was not fully equipped for extensive riot control, nor did it have the means to communicate and
negotiate with such a large and disjointed crowd. Likewise, the inability to halt the assembling processes of the crowd on Aberdeen was central to the gathering’s eventual density. Although the public knowledge of an enhanced police force for the evening may have worked as a deterrent for some, Kingston Police Inspector Brian Cookman’s public remarks were largely non-threatening: “He emphasized that police don't want to stop anyone from partying - as long as they do so responsibly” (Armstrong 2005a:para22). Ultimately, the widespread publicity of the event on Aberdeen Street, along with failed attempts at advance planning for the prevention of an out-of-control Aberdeen Street party, set the stage for the crowd assembly.

**EVENT TRANSACTIONS**

**The Assembling Process**

On Saturday, September 24th, during Homecoming 2005, a “quiet two-block long public street just north of campus” became the setting for the largest Queen’s University street party to date. Aberdeen Street, where today all but one house has not been renovated into a student rental, drew a record congregation of an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 partygoers “to drink, make noise, and revel in the feeling of being part of something big and wild” (Ross 2005:1). The “near-riot” (Armstrong 2005b:para1) that resulted followed, for many, a full day of both university-sponsored and unsanctioned parties and events. “Pancake kegers”, house parties in the student ghetto which offer beer and pancake breakfasts for a small fee, began at 10 a.m. However, before noon, four illegal keg parties in the
Queen’s neighbourhood were “shut down” (ibid:para7) by police who also charged 56 people with Liquor License Act offences. Early police presence and swift action in the student ghetto was intended to bring an awareness to the public that the police would not be “putting up with any law-breaking and [that] anyone who steps off private property [with open liquor] will be issued a fine” (ibid:para13).

Just before 2 p.m. students, alumni, and other Kingston football fans set out to attend the annual Queen’s Golden Gaels Homecoming football game, which drew a sellout crowd of 10,818 (Queen’s University Athletics and Recreation Online 2005) to Richardson Stadium. Gaels fans chanted and cheered, drank beer, and booed the visiting team, the Ottawa Gee-Gees, who eventually prevailed with a 33-18 victory over Queen’s. Despite the loss, the celebrations continued, and not long after the game’s crowd dispersed, many “small front-yard parties” (Armstrong 2005b:para5) sprouted up throughout the student ghetto.

**The Temporary Gathering**

While few police officers began monitoring the streets neighbouring the university early Saturday morning, a stronger police presence was noticeable by 5 p.m. As some partiers made their way over to Aberdeen in the late afternoon hours, police also set out into the ghetto in pairs until sunset, when approximately 115 officers patrolled the area. The police force also included two mounted officers on horseback, many unmarked and marked police cars, three unmarked vans (at least one was “full of riot gear” (ibid:para9), and a vehicle to transport offenders.
downtown (Burgmann 2005b). Despite the visible police presence, the party grew and showed early signs of disorder when, at 8:45 p.m., the first beer bottle was “lobbed onto upper Aberdeen Street and [exploded] on the pavement” (Armstrong 2005b:para18). Six officers immediately lurched towards the area to investigate the act that would become only the first of thousands that night. For the most part, however, the party was seemingly under control and at 9 p.m. Sgt. Chris Scott, the second-in-command for the evening, decried that so far the party was “‘better than last year’” (ibid:para23) and predicted that the party was likely to remain that way if the police could retain a “‘consistent, fair approach’”.

Until about 10 p.m., when an estimated 1,000 people filled the sidewalks and lawns on Aberdeen, the police, along with 35 Queen’s Campus Security volunteers, managed to keep the street “passable” (Burgmann 2005b:para16). At this point, the police cube vans were dismissed and although chants of “Ole, ole” were gaining momentum within the crowd and broken bottles were accumulating on the street, the party was still somewhat tame. At around 10:15, the crowds began “spilling onto the street” (Armstrong 2005b:para32) and the two mounted police officers made a “final effort” to force people back onto the sidewalks and lawns. Beside the horses, one young man began to dance a “jig” (ibid) and was quickly detained and escorted away by police. By 10:30, the crowd, which had grown to about 3,000 participants, could no longer be confined to the yards, where some “drunken ‘party-goers’ vomited and relieved themselves on front lawns and porches” (Ross
Without hesitation, many people began piling onto the street, calling “‘Everybody get on the street- fuck the police.’” (Burgmann 2005b:para17). As partygoers finally enjoyed free-reign of the street, a group of young men gathered around the sole car parked on Aberdeen that evening and proceeded to flip it over several times, filling the air with a strong stench of gasoline. About a dozen people then jumped atop the overturned car and began “stomping it, crushing it, breaking glass, swaying drunkenly and waving beer bottles in the air” (Armstrong 2005b:para33). The debacle, accompanied by the setting of firecrackers and cheering from some crowd members, continued without protest from spectators in the crowd, most of whom were “just standing around” (Ross 2005:2).

By then, Inspector Brian Cookman, who supervised the weekend’s police presence, determined that the crowd of at least 5,000 posed substantial danger to officers. Subsequently, this forced the police to retreat and deal with the party from the perimeters, “forming blockades that at one count numbered about 17 officers on each of the north and south entrances of the streets” (ibid). These “human barricades” (ibid), accompanied by a few officers in riot gear, allowed partygoers to leave Aberdeen but did not permit any entry to those arriving after 11 p.m. Newcomers continued to show up in large groups, some of whom had attended the concert on-campus but had left the quiet scene in pursuit of something more exciting. Although police officers blocked the street’s entryways, hundreds of people lined up outside the barricade. As the crowd on the other side of Aberdeen continued to expand, many outsiders
determined to attend the party found alternative entries, as they trudged through alleyways and “trampled and destroyed backyard fences and gardens” (ibid:1).

Just after 11 p.m., an ambulance arrived and two paramedics with a stretcher were escorted into the crowd by the mounted officers to rescue a barely conscious young woman who had alcohol poisoning. Members of the crowd reluctantly let the rescue crew through, and some people were quick to curse at the paramedics and police officers. Other crowd members were treated for cuts on their feet from the broken glass that formed a thick layer over the street. That night, the Frontenac Paramedic Services team responded to over 15 calls from the Aberdeen Street area.

At around midnight, two fire engines also arrived at the scene to inspect the potentially explosive overturned car, which was still the party’s main attraction. The firefighters, immediately bombarded with bottles and blocked by crowd members pumping “their fists in the air” (ibid), were forced to retreat and had to delay dealing with the smashed up car. In the meantime, the firefighters answered nine alcohol-related medical emergencies and extinguished a few scattered bonfires in the Aberdeen area. Fire and Rescue also monitored the area’s indoor parties and ended up clearing out four overcrowded houses whose residents were later charged with breaking fire hazard codes (Burgmann 2005b).

As for the outdoor street party, the police continued to restrict entry to latecomers, many of whom gathered behind the police line and stayed to observe the event from the sidelines. Frustrated with the barricade at Earl
Street and Aberdeen, one young man eventually barged through onto Aberdeen, but was immediately apprehended by police officers and thrown against a wall. This was one of many scenes throughout the evening that contributed to the “palpable sense of confrontation in the air” (Mehler-Paperny 2005:2) between students and police.

At one a.m., firefighters were finally able to make their way to the overturned car and assess its potential threat to the crowd’s safety. Assistant Fire Chief Robert Kidd, accompanied that evening by 14 firefighters and three trucks, confirmed that “‘there was really no safety problem at that point’” (Burgmann 2005b:para23). Subsequently, the firefighters could not do much else but leave the scene, but not without being “cursed at, punched at, spat upon, and pelted with beer bottles” (Ross 2005:1). As the firefighters left the crowd, the overturned car was further celebrated as people hopped back on top of it to continue what some described as a game of “King of the Mountain” (Armstrong 2005b:para41). At this point, a few crowd members began to stage mini-spectacles of their own, as one “stumbling” (ibid:para 87) man smashed a mailbox to the ground, another marched around with a stop sign, and one man even stripped nude and strolled around William Street on roller-blades. The police continued to make arrests throughout the commotion, and the patrol wagon, filled with intoxicated partygoers, made “trip after trip” (Burgmann 2005b:para27) down to the police station. Despite the police action, a few young people continued to parade detached car parts down Aberdeen, while the people atop the car “waved a small, uprooted
tree in the air” (ibid:para25) and continued to “stomp on [the car], kick it, and try to rip off pieces” (Armstrong 2005b:para85) until about 1:30 a.m., when some youths started chanting: “‘Set it on fire! Set it on fire!’” (ibid: para86). The “drunken crew wobbling on top of the overturned car” (ibid:para85) finally succeeded in setting the car ablaze at about 2:20, and at this point a few crowd members began to pummel the car with beer bottles.

The Dispersing Process

With the sight of fire, many crowd members retreated from the area where the car was burning and the police were able to move in and clear the remaining people away from the car, just before the Fire Fighters’ return. Firefighters moved in quickly and extinguished the flames, while the remaining crowd members cheered from afar and continued to disperse. Finally, at about 3 a.m., after making 36 arrests, laying 2 criminal charges, and issuing 357 tickets (Ross 2005:2), police officers were able to clear the area completely.

In sum, the 2005 Aberdeen Street riot event stemmed from a number of precursory factors including a heavy media build-up, cautionary messages from local authorities, and a weekend of mass alcohol consumption which began for many on the Thursday night. On Saturday, mass attendance at the annual Homecoming football game reinforced the Aberdeen Street after party which began to draw participants in the late afternoon hours. Mobilization to the site continued throughout the evening and peaked with the arrival of students from residence halls and from the
on-campus concert. The Aberdeen Street party, which participants felt entitled to attend, shifted from crowd to riot at the onset of heightened police intervention tactics. The violent confrontation which ensued propelled unruly behaviour within the crowd, which led to the eventual overturning and burning of a car, a street of broken beer bottles, and a number of injuries and damages to public and private property.

**SIMILAR CASES**

Since the mid-1990’s, off-campus student celebratory rioting has become increasingly frequent, with such incidents totalling 178 in the United States from 1985 to 2001 (Buettner 2004:3). Furthermore, while a mere 10 campus riots not arising from a protest were observed in the United States between the years of 1985 and 1989, in the year of 2002 alone, 30 non-protest US campus riots were reported (McCarthy et al. 2002 in Schweingruber 2005:4). While Iowa State University reported eight riots and disturbances in 19 years (Barton 2004), Ohio State University tops the records with 19 riots or large student disturbances between 1996 and 2002, with the largest turnout involving an estimated 6,000 participants (Ohio State University 2003:25). This particular incident resulted in several injuries, 107 dumpster and couch fires and 20 damaged cars (ibid). The University of New Hampshire also experienced three significant riots in 2003, one of which, after a loss to the University of Minnesota in the national championship NCAA hockey game, drew 4,000 participants and led to 87 arrests (Kurtz 2005). Subsequently, to celebrate their hockey team’s NCAA victory, students at the University of
Minnesota also participated in rowdy off-campus celebrations (Gilyard 2003a).

Although many of these events are “short-lived and characterized by petty vandalism, some turn deadly” (Kleiss 2006:para8). In 2004, two college students died while participating in celebratory riots, one following the New England Patriots Super Bowl win and the other after a Boston Red Sox win. Subsequently, many American universities spawned reports (Ohio State University 2003; Schweingruber 2005; University of Colorado 2002; University of New Hampshire 2003a) intended to bring the issue of student rioting to the public’s attention and to propose potential preventative initiatives. Extensive concern about the “growing number of post-game riots on U.S. campuses has garnered serious attention from academics, schools and police” (Kleiss 2006:para11), and has also led to the subsequent organization of large “summits” and conferences at universities across the U.S. in order to “promote responsible, alternative ways to celebrate” (Gilyard 2003a:para4).

As celebratory riots become increasingly widespread and frequently reported in the media, they have begun to adopt a “ritualized aspect” (Marx 1970:27) and have even been described by some as “‘institutionalized’ in the sense that participants and [police] expect them to happen” (ibid). Overall, Queen’s student party riots are merely an example of a current North American trend.
COMPARISON CASE: OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CELEBRATORY RIOT 2002

Ohio State University (OSU) students have participated in a number of disorderly gatherings over the past two decades and one incident in particular, which took place in November 2002, was nearly identical to the 2005 Queen’s Homecoming case and can subsequently be used to ground the Aberdeen Street event in an emergent broader context of celebratory student rioting. The nineteen student disturbances observed in Columbus, Ohio between the years of 1996 and 2002 share many characteristics with the Queen’s University Homecoming parties of recent years. Much like the noticeable shift in Homecoming celebrations on Aberdeen from mere “disturbance” in 2002 to “riot” in 2005, student party celebrations in Columbus increased in size and damages each year from 1996 to 2002. In Columbus, only one party became riotous between the years 1996 and 2000. However, from the years 2000 to 2002, seven large student disturbances (of a total of nine) resulted in rioting (Ohio State University 2003:21-6).

One Columbus riot, which took place on the evening of Saturday, November 23, 2002, drew an unprecedented crowd size of 4,000 to 6,000 participants to the common student party area on and surrounding High Street (ibid:25). A disturbance was predicted earlier in the day after the Ohio State football team’s home victory over Michigan State, where rowdy behaviour broke out at the stadium and increased at the after-game gatherings on Chittenden, 13th, 15th, and High Streets. Following “much
media ‘hype’” (ibid) surrounding the game that won OSU a berth in the national Championship game, the large game crowds, whose members were described as displaying an apparent “victory ‘earned us a right to riot’ attitude” (ibid:26), dispersed and continued to celebrate in the neighbourhood surrounding OSU for the remainder of the night. Parties and street gatherings on High Street in particular quickly became overcrowded with “‘falling down drunks’” (ibid:25) despite the free food and water booths set up on High Street by the OSU Student Wellness, Residence Life and Campus Dining Services and sponsored by the Parent Association Off Campus Student Services to inhibit intoxication and encourage responsible alcohol consumption and behaviour. Furthermore, this gathering, which drew many participants who had been already been drinking all weekend at various celebrations and early morning “‘kegs and eggs’” (ibid:26) parties, was not prevented by a free concert planned by university officials on campus or by the presence of OSU staff neighbourhood patrols. Although beer and liquor distributors agreed to comply with the Mayor’s request to limit “keg sales to one per person” (ibid), these restrictions did not inhibit general access to alcohol as retailers still reported “heavy beer sales all weekend” (ibid).

Although some University administrators at Ohio State predicted this party weekend would become rowdy, many students insisted that since they had “proven” (ibid) themselves by throwing riot-free parties since the spring, there was no longer a need for the University to broadcast zero tolerance messages concerning student behaviour. Ohio State student
warnings were subsequently less threatening concerning potential sanctions for disruptive behaviour that weekend, which may have inadvertently encouraged “heavy migration from residence halls” (ibid) and played a significant part in rendering such a large gathering on High Street.

By the end of the evening, the event had resulted in a total of 70 participant arrests (17 of which were students) (ibid:25), six student suspensions (ibid:26) and one permanent student dismissal (ibid). Furthermore, many injuries were sustained during the event, including several broken legs at the football game when fans rushed the field (ibid:25). Damages throughout the evening also included 107 couch and dumpster fires and 20 smashed and or burned cars in the student party area (ibid).

Just like the Homecoming party in Kingston, the riot precursors to the party in Columbus included alcohol consumption, which began on the Thursday night before the riot, pancake keggers on Saturday morning, an early football game at the university’s stadium, heightened media coverage predicting a potential disturbance, mass attendance from on-campus students and high levels of student intoxication (Madensen and Eck 2006:26). Furthermore, the riot transactions in Columbus mirrored the riot processes observed at the Aberdeen street party; both events involved binge drinking, exhibited a perceived sense of entitlement among participants, resulted in damaged and burned cars, led to many arrests, and occurred despite the university’s attempts at planning a free concert on
campus to deter attendance at off-campus parties (Ohio State University 2003:25-6). The formation and growth of these two riots to an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 members (in Columbus) and 5,000 to 7,000 members (in Kingston) as well as the transactions that occurred during the riot processes can be theorized by using elements of contagion, normative, rational choice, and event-centred theories of the riot.

THEORIZING THE CROWD ASSEMBLY

The crowd that became riotous in Columbus in November 2002 and the crowd that rioted on Aberdeen Street at the Queen’s Homecoming event in September 2005 assembled in parallel fashions, suggested comparable participant counts and consisted of similar members in terms of individual characteristics. Both of these riots took place at planned parties near the university campuses, involved mostly young adults, followed daytime celebrations and an excessive consumption of alcohol, drew large, unprecedented numbers of participants, attracted many out-of-towners, and developed despite public calls for non-participation. Event-centred theories of the riot cite media precursors, rumours, the widespread use of communication technologies, the physical and social conduciveness of these event settings, and peer pressure to attend these celebrations as elements which, in combination, led to the assembly of the crowds on High Street in Columbus and on Aberdeen Street in Kingston.

First of all, the emergence of these two gatherings can be attributed to a number of factors that were present prior to the development of the riot, which are often referred to as event precursors (Sacco and Kennedy
2008:32) or assembling processes (McPhail 1994:12). In both cases, media attention, advertising campaigns, mass cellular phone and Internet communication among students, and rumours circulating before the student parties provided descriptions of the “nature of the location” (Sacco and Kennedy 2008:32) of these predicted parties and also generated many “purposes for assembling” (McPhail 1994:11) to potential partygoers. Advance information regarding a large party was essential to the development of both of these riots. Efforts at Queen’s (“AMS ad campaign ineffective”, September 23, 2005) and Ohio State University (Ohio State University 2003) to prevent student party riots with advertising campaigns and visits to student homes may have deterred some people from attending the unsanctioned parties, but were not completely successful in generating persuasive reasons for thousands of others to stay away.

Contagion theories posit that the crowd formed despite threats from local authorities because “the gathering of a crowd automatically causes more onlookers to accumulate” (Momboisse 1967:15). Accordingly, these two large parties in Columbus and in Kingston, which were each located en route to and from other events and parties, both reached a state of congestion very quickly.

Rational choice theories further explain the conscious choice participants made to join these two crowds in terms of individual risk assessment. Whether to incite disorder, to satisfy curiosity about what would happen or to merely be a part of the event (Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention 2003:23),
those who attended these parties decided the rewards associated with crowd participation outweighed the costs (Henry and Eaton 1999). Although the media covered previous student disturbances and issued warnings prior to these two riots, the disclosure of the upcoming events’ details did not work as a deterrent, but instead served as an advertisement for the post-football game parties and further confirmed of the “tradition” of these celebrations. For example, the media coverage following past disturbances and preceding the Ohio State University riots and the Queen’s Homecoming riots “spurred interest” (“Madness and Mayhem”, September 27, 2005:para6) in these events. Since “all the negative attention set the stage for this self-fulfilling prophecy” (ibid), the media actually acted as a network for enforcing the “hype” (Ohio State University 2003:25) regarding these events and therefore led to the higher levels of participation.

Rumor processes, as outlined in normative theories, also played a role in the crowds’ assembling processes in Columbus and in Kingston. The football games that preceded each of these riots provided the arena for students at both schools to spread the each evening’s party details and recruit additional participants. Furthermore, rumors of extended partying enabled “collective problem-solving” (Shibutani 1966:17) by proposing the moving of celebrations from the football stadia to High Street in Columbus and to Aberdeen Street in Kingston.

Recent technological developments also catered to the assembling processes at these two events. The widespread student use of cellular
phones and the Internet undoubtedly accounted for unprecedented crowd sizes at these two party sites. Firstly, the increase in recent years of personal cell phones facilitated mobilization to the two party sites (University of New Hampshire 2003a). Because many students own cellular phones, it was easier to receive details of these events and arrive at High Street or Aberdeen Street when the action began. This resulted in a sudden rush and expansion of these crowds (Sacco 2006a:3). The Internet also acted as a network for the communication of mass emails and instant messenger which were largely responsible for the presence of out-of-towners “looking for excitement” (University of New Hampshire 2003b:para14).

Elements of structural conduciveness outlined in Smelser’s (1962) Value-Added theory also explain the crowd assemblies on Columbus’ High Street and on Kingston’s Aberdeen Street. First of all, the physical character of each of these street parties was conducive to drawing large crowds, as both parties were situated right in the middle of high pedestrian traffic areas, located within walking distance of residence halls, and held in run-down, densely-populated student neighbourhoods. For one, these physical features made mobilization easy for those who planned to attend in advance as well as for those who were merely passing by these areas. Therefore, the events’ locations allowed those without vehicles to attend, while a common lack of limited entry made early and pre-planned attendance unnecessary to secure access.
Furthermore, the general housing trends in such student neighbourhoods, which often consist of many single detached homes occupied by upwards of five student renters (Williams 1988:27), contribute to a heightened sense of unity and entitlement among student residents. Since student occupants are almost always renters who rarely stay in the same residency for more than two years\(^8\) (ibid:32), a lowered sense of long-term responsibility regarding property care also tends to arise in such neighbourhoods. These resultant effects increased the potential for unruly partying in the Kingston and Columbus student neighbourhoods.

Also, the timing and climate of these two street parties drew many more crowd participants than a mid-winter or rainy evening gathering would have yielded. While a large street party in the same Columbus neighborhood earlier in 2002 with similar characteristics to the November riot did not end in riotous proportions because of a “cold, damp” (Ohio State University 2003:26) weather forecast, both the High Street and Aberdeen Street parties that did become riotous occurred on mild nights with clear skies. In sum, the shared physical features of the settings at these two events certainly increased each area’s conduciveness to drawing a large crowd and heightened the likelihood of a riotous outcome (Lang and Lang 1970:109).

\(^8\) The most recent published data regarding off campus student housing at Queen’s University was collected in 1988 from a sample of 847 undergraduate students living off-campus (Williams 1989:15). No evidence exists to indicate any significant changes to these findings regarding the current patterns in student off-campus living at Queen’s. The survey findings reveal that 98.9% of students rent their accommodations for the duration of their academic studies in Kingston (ibid:29). The most significant group of students (48.4%) live in their current accommodations for 8 months (one academic year) or less, while only 4% reside in their present dwelling for over two years (ibid:32). Furthermore, almost two thirds of students reside in single detached homes (ibid:27) and 40.8% of students share their living quarters with at least 4 other persons.
Along with the physical nature of these two street party settings, the social characteristics of these parties increased attendance at these large crowd assemblies. Both areas were conducive to attracting celebratory crowds because the streets where these large gatherings occurred had already acquired “‘party street’” (Sacco 2006b:5) reputations among participants prior to these riots. Just as residents in Columbus’s student neighbourhood are known to “throw large parties” (Ohio State University 2003a:34), Kingston’s Aberdeen Street residents “choose to live there…with full knowledge of the street’s reputation” (Sacco 2006b: 5) and moved to the street with intentions of hosting or at least participating in “Homecoming and other parties” (ibid). Furthermore, the crowds observed in Columbus and in Kingston not only attracted participants from these two student neighborhoods, but they also drew participants from areas less conducive to partying. Physically and socially, the sites of these parties attracted crowds since they are both located “right in the middle of what is understood to be the student neighbourhood- both physically and ‘spiritually’” (ibid).

Furthermore, both event-centred theories and rational choice theories of the crowd conceive of the availability of alcohol and lack of strict regulatory supervision at these parties as factors which draw large crowds. Crowd participants in Columbus and Kingston chose to attend these events because they were looking to party in an atmosphere that was more conducive to drinking and celebrating than bars, which uphold liquor laws and cannot “accommodate large numbers of students” (Ohio State
University 2003:33). Furthermore, many of these celebrants are not of legal drinking age, which also explains the appeal of attending house parties where alcohol circulates freely (Buettner 2004:171).

Peer pressure to attend these events was also a large contributing factor to the crowd assemblies in Ohio and in Kingston. Normative theories cite emergent norms that arise in small groups as responsible for drawing large crowds to High Street in Ohio and Aberdeen Street in Kingston. According to Emergent-Norm theory (Turner and Killian 1972), when peers cited their approval of attending these events, fellow students followed because “‘everyone [was] doing it’” (Madensen and Eck 2003:36). Therefore, these gatherings were also shaped by a lack of leadership exhibited by student groups and other influential parties to advise potential attendees to stay away from the site (ibid:8). Messages deferred to the student bodies at both Ohio State and Queen’s were not sufficient to prevent these celebratory riots largely because of the students’ “perception of a pervasive disconnect between students and the rest of the university community” (Ohio State University 2003:29).

In addition, Smelser’s Value-Added theory (1962) would contend that the demographic characteristics of students as a whole, who generally see “large blocks of unscheduled time and few if any family responsibilities” (McCarthy et al. 2005:6) also contributed to the assembly of the crowds on High Street and Aberdeen Street. Each of these events was conducive to drawing a large crowd since the majority of the students
attracted to these events were available to gather at almost any time with few social controls restricting their attendance.

Finally, the absence of positive relations between police and students prior to these events (Sacco 2006b:8-9; Ohio State University 2003:38) may have also incited anxiety among those considering whether or not to attend the event. However, while police discouraged attendance at both of these parties, this strain was trumped by other forces, including peers and other students who advertised the social importance of one’s presence at the party. As fellow students stressed the importance and “tradition” (Sacco 2006b:4; Ohio State University 2003:28) of “the collective appropriation of local public places” (Loader 1996:51). In student culture at both OSU and Queen’s, peers are considered important authorities on accepted behaviour; therefore, they were also threatened with the assertion that non-attendance would result in social stigmatization by peer groups (Sacco 2006b:4). For many students, the culture of university life encourages them to think about participation in the event not as a deviant act, but as a conformist one (Sacco and Kennedy 2008:130). Therefore, crowd members did in fact act rationally in accordance with the social priorities of peer acceptance when they chose to attend these events.

THEORIZING THE CROWD ATMOSPHERE

The celebratory events that unfolded on High Street and on Aberdeen Street were, in most ways, characteristic of all student celebratory gatherings recently observed in North America, most of which “do not result in riotous behaviour” (McCarthy et al. 2005:6; Ohio State
University 2003:27). In fact, in many ways, the initial mood at each of these two events resembled the atmosphere observed at those gatherings which do not turn riotous. Contagion, normative, rational choice, and event-centred riot theories also speak to the mood and character of the parties in Columbus and in Kingston, which, shaped by many of the same features present at most off-campus student gatherings, included a celebratory nature, an alcohol-based culture, and a widespread sense of entitlement among crowd participants, including a perceived right to party. Accordingly, the tone of these celebrations is often disruptive, although it is not necessarily destructive or violent. Theories of the riot account for the fact that the atmosphere at these two events was originally celebratory in nature, while these theories also explain that the events were not pre-planned as riots and therefore only exhibited destructive tendencies later on in the evening.

First of all, the general celebratory mood which circulated through the crowds gathered on High Street and on Aberdeen Street was shaped by the “tradition”-related precursors evident in both the Ohio State and Queen’s University neighbourhoods. At both of these weekend-long celebrations, drinking began “as early as Thursday night” (Ohio State University 2003:26). However, since partiers deemed the Saturday night celebration the most important among their peers, this gathering warranted their presence regardless of many celebrants’ weary physical states. Klapp’s (1969) suggestion that many young people are in need of identifying rituals helps explain each student’s individual devotion to these
events, which was also, according to Turner and Killian (1972), normatively enhanced by peer pressure. Ultimately, these factors increased most participants’ investment in the continuation of the “tradition” of each of these parties and also led many participants to enforce a noticeably increased celebratory, although not initially riotous, tone.

Furthermore, these events did not originally exhibit a riotous atmosphere despite early and widespread intoxication. The development of a crowd atmosphere fuelled by a common goal of celebration and the shared desire to “party hard” (Ohio State University 2003:28) was enhanced at both of these events with the widespread availability of and expectation to consume alcohol. Not only did these parties provide easy access to alcohol with opportunities to buy beer from party hosts or to bring a personal supply to the site, but the events also lacked a system to ban “excessive and high-risk drinking” (ibid:35). Furthermore, Smelser (1962) would argue that the absence of an alcohol permit at these sites was conducive to underage drinking. Normative theories also contend that these party sites were further conducive to mass inebriation, as those who were not already drunk were likely to binge drink under the pressure to catch up with others.

Overall, the argument that these gatherings be viewed as “social events” (Sacco and Kennedy 2008) locates the pressure to engage in “excessive and high-risk drinking” (Ohio State University 2003:35) and the lack of restrictions on alcohol consumption at both of these events as precursors which subsequently fostered an alcohol-based party culture.
While rational choice theorists such as Lang and Lang (1970) explain that excessive intoxication at such events is often intended since it is a means to achieve lowered inhibitions and increase sociability, event-centred theorists such as Smelser and McPhail would contend that the excessive consumption of alcohol at both of these events did “not necessarily cause them” (Ohio State University 2003:35) but definitely contributed to their destructive nature. Therefore, the resulting effect of widespread intoxication enhanced these parties’ volume and aggressive energy, but did not necessitate riotous acts.

It can also be argued that the atmosphere at the events on High Street and Aberdeen Street was also shaped by an overriding sense of entitlement and a perceived right to party (“Staying riot-free…”, November 24, 2003; City of Boulder 2005; Sacco 2006b) which exists at many student gatherings. Event-centred theories (McPhail 1994; Sacco and Kennedy 2008; Smelser 1962) account for the sense of entitlement apparent among most crowd members at these student party riots, because the “right to party” atmosphere is shaped by precursors to these gatherings, including each event’s location and its perceived ownership. This allowed many crowd members to offer the rationalization that disruptive behavior was to be expected on these streets which are predominantly inhabited by students. One Queen’s student even proposed that if Kingston residents living in or near the student neighborhood had a problem with the Homecoming party, they “should go to the cottage for the weekend” (Pritchett 2005b:para14).
The large proportion of student renters (Ohio State University 2003a:11) in these areas also contributed to the increased sense of entitlement and indifferent attitude towards minor property damages that likely would result from any parties- riotous or not. Kornhauser’s (1959) theory of rootlessness and alienation suggests that poor relations between landlords and tenants were likely to the structural conduciveness of these two areas. Raiffa’s (1982) Decision theory further contends that as renters, most of these students were able to justify throwing parties at the residences they occupied and possessed temporarily since they had little or no incentive to prevent damage to these properties and dwellings.

THEORIZING THE SHIFT FROM CROWD TO RIOT

The transformation of a celebratory gathering into a riot event can be explained by a number of crowd elements outlined in contagion, normative, rational choice, and event-centred theories of the riot. Although it is difficult to ascertain what exactly turns a celebratory gathering into a riotous event, studies of student party riots at universities and colleges across the United States point to the combination of a highly influential crowd atmosphere, increased levels of peer-norm conformity and high-risk behaviour, structural conduciveness for “intended” (Ohio State University 2003:8) violence, the confrontation and show of violence between students and police, and the subsequent onset of “outcome” violence as the key factors in yielding a riot.

LeBon’s (1896) theory of the crowd and Blumer’s (1962) theory of circular reaction account for the large number of “normally well behaved”
(Ohio State University 2003:34), academically high-achieving students who participated in the student party riots in Ohio and in Kingston by blaming contagious forces that are beyond the students’ individual control once they are immersed in the crowd. The emergence of seemingly contradictory violent and impulsive behaviour of many of these riotous students is also explained by theories of contagion as a series of uncontrollable acts that arise only in large crowds. Although not all crowd members acted violently, most crowd members on High Street and Aberdeen Street did engage in troublesome behaviour, even if it was merely passive encouragement of destructive behaviour. Turner and Killian’s (1972) Emergent-Norm theory also upholds that the chants which circulated throughout these crowds, such as the Aberdeen Street anthem “Ole, ole”, heightened the sense of unity and contagion among crowd members. Behaviour observed at both the High Street and the Aberdeen Street riots, which included trashing cars (one on Aberdeen, 20 in Ohio) and setting them on fire (one on Aberdeen, 9 in Ohio) (Madensen and Eck 2003:25), as well as cursing and throwing bottles at police officers therefore falls under explanations of riot theories.

However, in both Columbus and Kingston, post-riot examination of the behaviour of crowd participants revealed discrepancies with the homogenous crowd image painted by theories of contagion. The majority of crowd members in both riots were merely observers and did not succumb to an element of contagion that led them to throw bottles or light fires. However, those who did become disorderly may have exhibited an
increased level of aggression found within these particular crowds (student party riots in general), because the majority of the participants in the High Street riot and the Aberdeen Street riot were young and intoxicated. Normative theories argue that the presence of many young crowd members was likely to have led to an elevated level of engagement in “high-risk behaviour” (ibid:34). Furthermore, Berk’s Game theory asserts that many students’ willingness to take risks they would not normally take may be accounted for within these two crowds as an attempt by students to gain peer support and social status (Turner and Killian 1972; Berk 1974).

Overall, the theoretical explanations of these two student party riots point to the generally widespread student norms as social controls which actually caused participants in the crowds on High Street and on Aberdeen Street to conform to the behavioural standards of each group. For many students, defiant norms may have acted as a frame of reference for behavior in these student gatherings. Norms and actions encouraged by the groups were even perceived as mandatory behaviour for some crowd members: “The (peer) pressure to actively participate in or at least attend the party is considerable” (Sacco 2006b:3). Furthermore, event-based theories (McPhail 1994; Sacco and Kennedy 2008; Smelser 1962) argue that without an apparent peer-enforced code of conduct conveyed in advance, many students were more apt to challenge the limits of rebellion from conventional authority at these parties. Therefore, out-of-character behaviour within these crowds may have had more to do with peer-reinforcement and the age of these crowd participants than with the
crowd’s contagious qualities. Ultimately, crowd members who exhibit heightened disorderly behaviour, show high-risk tendencies, and succumb to increased pressures to conform to social norms, may be more susceptible to these trigger events within the crowd setting which call for riotous responses.

The sudden shift in these events from gatherings to riots is also explained by rational choice theories as the effect of the crowd’s size at its peak combined with those who attended these events in hopes of inciting disorder. The riots in Columbus and Kingston took place on long, narrow streets which were also physically conducive to deviant behavior, as they generated many of the factors that facilitate crime: “poor street lighting” (Sacco and Kennedy 2008:57), “hidden alleyways” (ibid) and easy escape routes. Rational choice theories contend that these two riots were initiated with “intended violence” (Ohio State University 2003:28) that emerged when these crowds reached capacities that ensured anonymity and distance from police officers for those hoping to act destructively. According to Dollard and Miller’s (1950) Frustration-Aggression theory and Berk’s (1974) Game theory, the crowd members who became riotous consciously chose to act in such a manner and were merely waiting for the right opportunity to engage in “vandalizing and burning property” (Madensen and Eck 2003:28). Therefore, crowds which draw participants looking to cause trouble in a setting that is largely conducive to anonymity and the provision of opportunities to act destructively are likely to become riotous.
However, the studies of the High Street and Aberdeen Street riots reveal that gatherings which shift to riots can also be explained by transactions between crowd members and local authorities which lead to “outcome violence” (Ohio State University 2003:28)- disorderly behaviour which was not originally intended by crowd members. Event-centred theories explain how some participants at these two gatherings who did not initially intend on participating in a riot ended up shouting profanities at police officers, smashing beer bottles or setting a fire. Perception Control theory (Powers in McPhail 1994:16) explains that an “individual’s behaviour is not governed by consequences or action outcomes”, but that it is instead developed by selecting “stimuli that match their intentions” (ibid). This theory further explains that crowd members who shouted profanities, resisted arrest and even threw bottles at police officers and firefighters may not have acted in such a manner outside of the riot event, but that they aligned their reactions during these riots with an increased sense of self-righteousness and the defense of a “tradition” (University of New Hampshire 2003a:para7) to celebrate with parties which they felt they had “earned” (ibid:para8).

Essentially, the confrontation with police officers at these two events most likely prompted each crowd’s transformation from gathering to riot. As is evidenced in numerous case studies of student celebratory gatherings, the mere presence of police officers at a party is not enough to spark a riot (McCarthy et al. 2005; Ohio State University 2003:38). At events of all kinds, “police aggressiveness and the threat in participant
behavior are closely linked” (McCarthy et al. 2005:33), and accordingly, police officers use force in dispersing crowds at a fraction of student gatherings (ibid:2). However, given the “frequency with which convivial, protest, sport and other gatherings occur in these campus communities” (ibid:6), police monitoring High Street and Aberdeen Street were prepared to use force if necessary. Once each of these crowds was too large for police officers to restrain, and a lack of trust and respect between crowd members and police officers became apparent at each of these gatherings, police officers, as a unit, judged each event as unlawful to the extent that it warranted the use of force.

This process results in the above mentioned “outcome violence”, which is typically seen when police attempt to “disperse large groups of drunken partiers” (Ohio State University 2003:28). Factors which precipitated the confrontations in Columbus and in Kingston included observations of police officers who issued tickets and fines for open liquor, police who barricaded the street, the presence of officer(s) on horseback, and paraded transport vehicles. All of these images likely triggered an increased sentiment of defiance among partygoers since they were interpreted as unwarranted attempts to shut down the events perceived by students as “nothing more serious than a ‘party’” (Sacco 2006b:2).

Therefore, because most participants at the gatherings in Columbus and in Kingston had a common goal of “‘partying hard’” (Ohio State University 2003:28), when police officers threatened to interfere with the attainment of this goal, crowd members attempted to “eliminate that
interference” by resisting police officers’ calls to abandon the scene. On the other hand, in both cases the police had a common goal of dispersing these crowds after they were deemed a threat to public safety (ibid: 25; Ross 2005:2). The struggle between the police force and the crowd at each of these events then resulted in “purposive resistance” (Ohio State University 2003:28) from both parties towards the interference of each group’s respective goals. Thus, if there had not been a widespread belief that authorities were imposing an “infringement on their rights” (Zarnett 2005:para7) by trying to break up a harmless party, crowd participants on High Street and Aberdeen Street would not have reacted so negatively to the police presence.

The non-dispersal of these two crowds, despite the use of force by police officers, also attests to the level of many of the crowd members’ loyalty to their peers and to sustaining the “tradition” of partying in the student ghetto. In some cases, even the act of “creating such disturbances becomes a ‘tradition’ among students” (Madensen and Eck 2006:2). Large numbers of arrests for counts such as disorderly conduct, failure to disperse, breach of peace, and criminal mischief, the enforcement of which are all judgment calls largely based on police discretion (McCarthy et al. 2005:5), led to the crowd members’ perception of an unjustified use of force by police (Sacco 2006b:3). This then resulted in verbal and physical resistance on the part of many crowd members. Without any “leadership structure” (McCarthy et al. 2005:31) for these police forces to negotiate with, they then decided to use “aggressive tactics” (ibid) of “deploying
crowd control equipment” (ibid) in attempts to diffuse these crowds. Just as studies have shown that police are “more likely to use force at events” (ibid) when confronted physically by crowd participants, the defiance on the part of these crowd participants led, in turn, to the police forces’ justification of using even more force and aggressive tactical measures. Ultimately, the confrontations between members of the police force and the crowd participants on High Street and Aberdeen Street were characteristic of the scenes observed at most student party riots where “police and participants behaved violently, and subsequently representatives of each side accused the other of being responsible for the escalation” (ibid:8).

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of celebratory disturbances was undertaken in 2003 by the members of the Ohio State University’s Task Force on Preventing Celebratory Riots. This report provides an empirical description of and an attempt to make explanatory sense of student disturbances associated with Ohio State University students between the years of 1996 and 2002. An analysis of the Aberdeen Street event of 2005 alongside the Ohio State University riots in Columbus examined in the report reveals a pattern of precursors and event transactions which are common among recent student disturbances, which have “almost exclusively…been celebratory in nature” (Ohio State University 2003:20). After comparing the Aberdeen Street riot with the riots in Columbus, stark similarities between the events’ processes lead to
the conclusion that the riot on Aberdeen Street was not an isolated event; instead, it was entirely representative of the recent phenomenon of large student street parties and other student off-campus celebrations which result in disorderly and destructive behaviour.

In conclusion, this chapter ultimately reveals that there is nothing unique about the 2005 Queen’s Homecoming celebratory riot; the event is typical of incidents occurring in other times, other places and even what has happened at Queen’s in the past. The gathering which became riotous on Aberdeen Street in 2005 followed centuries of student unrest, dozens of recent celebratory disturbances occurring in university and college town across North America, and decades of partying in the Queen’s student ghetto. This chapter grounds the Aberdeen case in a similar celebratory event which took place in Columbus, Ohio in November 2002. Comparisons between the two events reveal that these non-protest related student disturbances can be explained by contagion, normative, rational choice, and event-centred theories of the riot, which attribute the causes of student party riots to a combination of factors found both in individual-centred and event-centred theories of the riot.

Individual-based theories of the riot provide fairly useful explanations concerning the role of the crowd’s influential nature, the power of peer pressure and normative behavioural expectations in the crowd setting, and the likelihood that crowd members do engage in risk assessment and choose to act based on a scale of costs versus rewards. Event-centred theories of behaviour, such as Sacco and Kennedy’s
(2008:34) “social event”, McPhail’s (1994:12) “riot processes”, and Smelser’s (1962:688) Value-Added theory, provide a comprehensive framework that can account for the more complex causes of celebratory riots, including the media build-up and initial planning, the event’s physical and social characteristics, the pre-determined relationship between crowd members and local authorities, and the incidence of outcome violence. Conclusively, an analysis of such student disturbances under both types of theoretical explanations conceives of the riot as an event which is not confined to the individual crowd members’ actions and isolated riot processes, but is instead also shaped by the riot precursors and the responses to the aftermath of previous events.

Arguments posed by these theorists are consistent with the analysis of numerous case studies documented in the Ohio State University’s Task Force on Preventing Celebratory Riots.

The arguments in this chapter which account for the long-standing nature of student unrest, the widespread incidence of celebratory student rioting in modern times, and the history of student partying at Queen’s, ultimately eliminate the rarity of the Aberdeen case and instead ground it in a wider context of similar events.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESPONDING TO CELEBRATORY RIOTS

The moral panic which resulted from the 2005 Aberdeen Street party in Kingston paralleled a trend of increased community concern and calls for long- and short-term prevention tactics in various American university and college towns also experiencing celebratory riots (Buettner 2004; City of Boulder 2002; Ohio State University 2003; Ruddell et al. 2005; Schweingruber 2005; University of Minnesota 2003; University of New Hampshire 2003a, 2003b). This chapter outlines the range of student, university, alumni, police, and community reactions which followed the Queen’s celebratory riot of 2005 and set the stage for the 2006 Homecoming celebrations. Although conflicting views emerged among the different stakeholder groups, wide-ranging public apprehension included an increased fear of social disorder and public concern for safety, threats to the reputation of the city and the university, and the further deterioration of town-gown relations.

In the public face of efforts to deal with the problem, the city of Kingston, like other cities faced with concern surrounding student party riots, appointed a group of local stakeholders to discuss the Homecoming incidents and present a list of recommendations designed to decrease the potential for future celebratory disturbances in the Queen’s student neighbourhood. This chapter examines the ad-hoc Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space’s (CSLU) recommendations and its various agendas, which over time, shifted from one of largely conservative, law-enforcement-oriented goals, to one of more liberal
objectives. Although the CSLU’s main goal, to move the Homecoming party out of the residential area and to strictly enforce laws on Aberdeen Street, was retained throughout the proceedings, the committee’s attempts to address the issue through means over which it had no jurisdiction undermined these recommendations.

QUEEN'S HOMECOMING 2005 AFTERMATH/2006 PRECURSORS

In the immediate and long-term aftermath of the 2005 Homecoming street party, the word “Aberdeen” conjured up a multitude of sentiments and mixed reactions among members of the Queen’s student body, Queen’s faculty and administration, the Kingston Police Force, Queen’s alumni, and local resident groups. Each of these responses was shaped by distinct political views and respective interests concerning Homecoming celebrations and how they should be dealt with in the future.

STUDENT RESPONSE

As early as the morning of Sunday September 25, 2005, students voiced opinions and responses concerning the Aberdeen Street incidents of the previous evening. Whether they had attended the party or not, many students had already formed a personal judgment concerning the severity of event, who was to blame, and what sanctions should follow. Some students were immediately defensive, claiming the party was not as bad as it had been depicted in the local media. Many of these students also defended their “‘right’” (“Madness and Mayhem”, September 27, 2005:para2) to party and cited student ownership of the area including and surrounding Aberdeen, known to many as the “student ghetto”. Many
students justified the party’s unruly nature as a defensive reaction to unwarranted reprimand and “excessive physical response by the police” (Zarnett 2005: para 7). Later, some students even defended their actions by citing the number of criminal charges laid on high-school students and out-of-towners (22) versus Queen’s students (0), which supported claims that the disturbances were caused by outsiders who were not in fact associated with the university (Smusiak 2006: 1). Along these lines, one student later described police arrests and charges at events such as the Homecoming party a “debacle” (“Aberdeen party no big deal”, May 5, 2006: para 6) and blamed the event’s negative public reception on the “stupidity of a minority of students” (ibid).

On the other hand, some students “expressed shame and regret” (Ross 2005: 2) about the party’s turn of events. Many felt that the negative national attention the party received diminished the already poor town-gown relations between Queen’s University and the Kingston community. Some students, whether involved in the party or not, clearly felt a sense of responsibility to the city, and on Sunday morning formed a clean-up squad to tackle the considerable after-party debris and broken glass that encompassed Aberdeen and its surrounding streets (Burgmann 2005b).

However, just over six months after the 2005 Homecoming party, a focus group study undertaken for the CSLU, revealed minimal student distress concerning the Homecoming party’s possible long-term detrimental effect on Queen’s reputation or on alumni support (Sacco 2006b: 3). Some students even suggested that many alumni who attended
the Aberdeen Street party acted “impetuously” (Macmillan 2005:para5) and should be held responsible for their participatory actions. However, for the most part, concern was evident surrounding the possibility of cancelling future Homecoming celebrations. The focus groups, which totalled 80 Queen’s students and were held in February and March of 2006, mirrored a widespread conviction among students that the event had been blown out of proportion and that people should “just take a deep breath, count to 10, and relax” (Woodhall 2005:para1). This general reaction prescribed a liberal response to the problem and favoured the interests of those who wished to continue attending future Homecoming celebrations on Aberdeen Street.

**QUEEN’S ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE**

Queen’s administrators were also divided in their reactions to the Aberdeen event as university officials both denied and accepted responsibility on behalf of the university. After the Homecoming party, members of the Queen’s administration issued several press releases and were subject to mass public scrutiny regarding their lack of control over unruly students. In an attempt to salvage the university’s reputation, Queen’s principal Karen Hitchcock immediately promised that investigations were underway and that sanctions for the “lawlessness” (Hitchcock 2005:para1) of participating students would be issued by the AMS Judicial Committee. Hitchcock also apologized profusely for the “‘deplorable behaviour’” (ibid:para2) exhibited on Aberdeen Street, but took no responsibility for the party’s unruliness, which she conceded was
not caused by attitudes picked up at Queen’s, but by habits students “bring…but them” (Elliot 2006a:para7) to Kingston.

Despite the public apology, Queen’s administrators refused to contribute to the party’s policing bill, which totalled $119,000 (Russell 2006:3), claiming that the event was not sanctioned by the university or the Homecoming planning committee. Although Queen’s administrators attempted to distance themselves from the Aberdeen party’s mass negative publicity, they were also under pressure to provide Queen’s public relations officials with evidence of proactive administrative action. As a result, Queen’s administrators organized a number of meeting and public fora to discuss the disorderly evening and evoke solutions to prevent such disturbances. Queen’s administrators, undoubtedly fearful that many “important and influential alumni” (Shulist 2006:para2) may choose to withdraw large donations following the 2005 Aberdeen event, even called for student proposals for solutions to the problem in a contest that offered a $300 cash reward (Burgmann 2006:1). In the end, however, the Principal firmly stated that the discretion for dealing with future party riots is not in the university’s hands, but is ultimately “the police force’s decision” (Elliot 2006a:para14). Overall, Queen’s administrative reactions to the event were generally focused on repairing the damages done to the university’s reputation, which explains Queen’s initial refusal to take ownership of the Homecoming party and play a part in shaping future events.
ALUMNI RESPONSE

Queen’s alumni who responded publicly to the events on Aberdeen Street were generally disappointed, embarrassed and worried about the long term effects on the university and its reputation. However, much like current Queen’s students, not all alumni condemned the entire student body for the evening’s riotous outcome; many alumni acknowledged that the Homecoming disruptions, which made national headlines, were merely the outcome of a “‘small number’” (Shulist 2006:para12) of students who “went over the top” (ibid). Nonetheless, Queen’s alumni feared that the party’s negative media coverage could lead to the diminishment of the university’s degree and professional standing (ibid). Although most alumni response was limited to messages expressing disappointment, some alumni were outright “ashamed and outraged” (Chisamore 2005: 3) and consequently chose to “‘adjust downward their financial contributions directly because of Aberdeen’” (Shulist 2006:para2).

Furthermore, while the 2005 Homecoming media coverage did not seem to have a significant long-term effect on the university’s reputation, Dan Rees, the president of the Queen’s University Alumni Association, warned students and Queen’s administrators that the Homecoming party cycle needed to be addressed and suppressed immediately to avoid what would inevitably result from another Homecoming riot- “‘much bigger negative consequences from almuni’” (ibid:para8). Generally, although many alumni acknowledged it may take years to develop long-term strategies to eliminate student disturbances, most alumni agreed on the
need for immediate action in order to prevent repeated negative media attention and long-term detriment to the Queen’s reputation. Therefore, although many alumni supported the need for local action leading up to Homecoming 2006, prescriptions for specific responses were absent since many alumni seemed to be more concerned with avoiding negative publicity rather than targeting the root causes of such disturbances.

RESIDENT RESPONSE

Many non-student Kingston residents also spoke out about the Homecoming party and its long-term impact on the greater Kingston community. The event’s “prominent media coverage from coast to coast” (Ross 2005:2) evidently increased public concern over the Aberdeen Street party and added to the “‘backsliding’” (Pritchett 2005a:para16) of town-gown relations. Some members of the Kingston community expressed their grievances regarding the student party at public fora, in the Queen’s Alumni Review, and on editorial pages of the Kingston Whig-Standard. At a turn-out of over one-hundred speakers and auditors in Queen’s Wallace Hall on Tuesday October 25, 2005, a number of Kingston residents called the Homecoming incidents “‘very upsetting’” (Mehler-Paperny 2005:1) and there was a need to address aggressively the attitude that it is “all right for students to disregard the law”. Residents who expressed their feelings in the local newspapers frequently described the student party as “a mess of drunken, rowdy students” (Pritchett: 2005a:para19) and called its costs to the city “preposterous” (ibid:para15). The negative public response to the 2005 Homecoming party on Aberdeen Street confirmed the increased
tension in the neighbourhoods around Queen’s and the resulting harm to town-gown relations. Overall, community reactions called for a conservative zero-tolerance response regarding the law enforcement of future student disturbances in residential areas.

**POLICE RESPONSE**

Although members of the Kingston Police Force were not pleased with the events that took place on Aberdeen Street, many officers were, in fact, “extremely proud” (Armstrong 2005b:para111) of the police response and the “restraint they showed” (ibid) that night. On the morning after the 2005 Homecoming incidents on Aberdeen Street, however, Kingston Police Inspector Brian Cookman described the evening as an “‘abysmal failure’” (Burgmann 2005a:para24) in terms of preventing a recurrence of the previous year’s “‘drunken street brawl’” (Armstrong 2005b:para4). Increased concern for community safety resulted in musings about “using riot squads and other crowd control measures” (Elliot 2006a:para13) which continued until the end of the year and throughout 2006 as other unruly student parties resulted in mini recurrences of the Aberdeen event (Li 2006b:1).

Furthermore, some members of the Kingston Police Force were angered with the mounting funds exhausted on this annual event; in 2005, Homecoming policing costs for one night of partying exceeded $100,000 (Armstrong 2006b:para4). After placing much of the blame on the university’s lenient student policies, Police Chief Bill Closs sent a bill for $84,000 to Queen’s University (ibid). This unanticipated demand angered
members of the Queen’s administrators, who denied playing a role in the party’s occurrence. Closs expressed further disapproval of the university’s approach to the event; he explicitly criticized the “continued deliverance of a message that it has no connection with the carnage on Aberdeen Street” (Closs 2006:para5). Although he acknowledged the university’s concerns surrounding possible “liability and risk management” (ibid:para6), Closs warned that the “university’s attempted denial of any liability would never guarantee its escape from any future litigation”. Concerning their refusal to contribute financially, Closs mused that Queen’s administrators were undoubtedly embarrassed by his tactic of publicly sending the bill without prior consultation with the university (ibid).

COMMITTEE FOR THE SAFE AND LEGAL USE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE

Despite mixed reactions to the Aberdeen event from Queen’s students, Queen’s administrators, Queen’s alumni, members of the Kingston community, and Kingston police officers, most parties agreed that public safety, along with the reputation of the city and the university and the relations between the two were top priorities that needed to be addressed prior to the 2006 Homecoming weekend. After a public consensus was reached that a stronger, and wider community effort was required to deal with the problem of celebratory riots, an ad-hoc committee was formed at City Hall.

Originally called the Committee to Restore Order, it was chaired by Floyd Patterson, the City Councillor representing the Queen’s neighbourbood and its surrounding area, Sydenham Ward. Each of the
committee members was then specifically chosen by Patterson to reflect the interests of each constituency. These individuals were ultimately chosen on the basis of their stakes in the intervention of these student events, as well as for their external knowledge concerning either the law, the student culture at Queen’s, these types of disturbances in a greater social context, the Kingston student neighbourhood area and its specific characteristics, or the development of municipal policy. To meet these requirements, nine members were selected, including committee chairs Patterson and Naomi Lutes, Queen’s AMS Municipal Affairs Commissioner (later replaced by Ryan Quinlan-Keech when her term expired), Deputy Police Chief Dan Murphy, Queen’s Sociology Professor Vincent Sacco, Queen’s alumnus and local lawyer Paul Fay, Queen’s Dean of Student Affairs Janice Deakin, Williamsville (a Kingston ward which also houses many Queen’s students) City Councillor Ed Smith, Queen’s neighbourhood resident Richard Strong, and Queen’s student and neighbourhood resident Jay Collins.

The committee, which held open meetings throughout its eight-month term, was immediately concerned with public perceptions of its intentions, which not only influenced many of its subsequent recommendations, but also led to the decision to change its name to the Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space (CSLU).
Political Complications

From the beginning of its work, the CSLU was plagued with various underlying political complications, particularly since 2006 was an election year. This suggested that some CSLU members had personal stakes in the committee’s course of action and its public reception. It certainly appeared that Mayor Harvey Rosen, in collaboration with other members of council had no choice but to support the formation of such a committee, if for no other reason than to appear concerned about the public face of the Aberdeen problem. Subsequently, regardless of its findings and solutions, the committee’s open and meetings ensured that the Mayor would not be penalized by voters concerned with preventing further student disturbances.

Political complications within the committee also surrounded city councillors Floyd Patterson, the committee’s chairperson, and Ed Smith, who were planning on running for re-election shortly after Homecoming 2006 was scheduled to take place. Their contributions to CSLU discussions seemed to reflect their political agendas which were originally aligned with the conservative law-enforcement-centred concerns of many community members, but eventually shifted to a more liberal stance which could be attributed to hopes of attracting student votes in largely student-populated ridings. In fact, by the end of the CSLU’s term, Patterson had transferred his full support away from zero-tolerance policies and into the AMS initiatives which basically endorsed an unsanctioned party on Aberdeen Street.
Furthermore, as the committee’s work came to a close, two of the committee members were also ending their terms in the roles that had been responsible for their membership in the CSLU in the first place. In the summer of 2006, Professor Janice Deakin announced that she would soon retire from her role as Queen’s Dean of Student Affairs to become the Dean of Graduate Studies, while Deputy Police Chief Dan Murphy also made public his approaching retirement from the police force. Subsequently, their stakes in the implementation of the committee’s objectives became largely inconsequential.

Despite the committee’s original drive towards conservative views in light of the Homecoming problem, concerns to remain objective were raised early on. Accordingly, after discussion concerning the backlash that was likely to result from the committee’s original seemingly reprimanding and condescending title, the group’s members agreed on the necessity of changing the committee’s name. Thus, the Committee to Restore Order became the Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space, a title which members hoped would avert perceptions that the committee was merely concerned with laying blame and therefore incite less controversy among the stakeholders involved in the issue of student disturbances.

As the CSLU proceeded to discuss possible solutions to the Aberdeen Street problem, major political issues continued to arise. First of all, the circumstances under which the idea of a committee emerged as well as the processes by which committee members were appointed
suggest that the committee’s chair was guided by public officials to pursue plans that would most likely render immediately visible results in the public face of the problem. Accordingly, the chair focused on short-term aspects of the problem, while long-term issues and initiatives were not discussed until other CSLU members highlighted deep-rooted aspects of the problem and pressured the committee to investigate possible long-term solutions. However, it appeared that because these initiatives would take many years to implement and to show results, they were often pushed to the background of CSLU discussions.

Furthermore, it may be suggested that the committee was not wholly representative of the public, but was used mainly to further the interests of some CSLU members. Although the CSLU held open meetings, public appeals were often dismissed immediately or outright ignored. Furthermore, when certain committee members raised concerns that did not align with other members’ agendas, it seemed as though the latter members made little efforts to hiding their personal opposition to the formers’ proposals. For example, when CSLU and AMS member Quinlan-Keech suggested the distribution of red cups on Aberdeen Street in order to reduce harm through the elimination of broken bottles, councillor Paterson and resident Strong immediately vetoed the idea since it conflicted with the zero-tolerance policy they were pushing.

On the other hand, when the suggestion of sending the Queen’s Code of Conduct home to Queen’s students’ families to deter student disturbances was brought up, Queen’s student and AMS member Quinlan-
Keech opposed the suggestion perhaps because it compromised his own agenda for the Aberdeen Street party. Furthermore, on numerous occasions Quinlan-Keech voiced his opposition to the planning of any “alternate” events and hinted that he would in fact attend unsanctioned Homecoming celebrations on Aberdeen in 2006. As a result, it became increasingly evident that the committee’s priorities were not rooted in a general public representation, but were instead focused on furthering the specific interests of particular constituencies represented by CSLU membership.

Finally, for the cynical observer, at times the CSLU appeared to be nothing more than a tool in Mayor Harvey Rosen’s political campaign. Since the committee itself had no authority to implement any initiatives, its power was merely symbolic. Essentially, following Rosen’s criticism of the 2005 Homecoming party and his hard-lined stance on future parties, the committee also began with a conservative mandate (and name) aiming to soothe public fear surrounding future Homecoming student party riots. As the committee’s term came to a close, Rosen’s stance on the issue became increasingly ambiguous. However, after he spoke briefly at the committee’s final meeting, it became clear that he was not concerned with the committee’s report after all and that he was ultimately aware of the CSLU’s lack of power with regards to shaping the event. Subsequently, one could argue that Rosen’s main use for the committee was to gain media coverage and public exposure for his campaign. Furthermore, after the CSLU report was undermined by interest groups advocating safety-oriented initiatives, Rosen’s confidence in the community’s perception that
he had taken action to decrease disorder in the student neighbourhood allowed him to simultaneously endorse Queen’s and AMS initiatives in hopes of attracting student voters for the 2006 election.

**Procedural Complications**

After meeting for eight months following the Aberdeen Street riot of 2005, the CSLU formulated a list of 19 recommendations aimed at preventing further unsanctioned Homecoming gatherings in the student ghetto. However, these recommendations faced a number of procedural complications, which ultimately undermined their practical value.

While many of the recommendations were rooted specifically in public concerns to encourage community pride, advocate safety and health, and avert illegal and negligent behaviour, the safety of students, the police force, and the community, was deemed the top priority (Mehler-Paperny 2006a:4) among interest groups with the power to shape the event. Accordingly, recommendations which favoured law enforcement over safety at unsanctioned events were overruled.

Furthermore, the CSLU did not have access to many of the material and human resources it required in order to enforce its suggestions. For one, the CSLU did not have the power to ensure that any of the independent groups named in its report would indeed act on the committee’s recommendations. Secondly, the report did not allot enough time for groups to act on many of these recommendations. Finally, the CSLU’s lack of representation undermined its findings, since many of the committee members, at the time of the CSLU’s closing stages, had already
shifted their support to other groups’ initiatives. Nevertheless, with nearly unanimous approval, each of the CSLU committee’s recommendations was passed upon its presentation to City Council. However, since many of these proposals were clearly located outside of the committee’s jurisdiction, it became apparent that the CSLU’s only likely accomplishment would be the presentation of an idealistic report to City Council and to the Kingston community.

**Committee Recommendations**

The first recommendation proposed by committee members strongly encouraged the planning of a legitimate Homecoming party organized around lawful principles and held on Queen’s-owned grounds outside of residential areas. Based on a majority vote by committee members, this recommendation, which ultimately supported conservative interests, was non-negotiable since the committee’s endorsement of unsanctioned celebratory gatherings in the student neighbourhood would enrage many Kingston residents who already felt that Queen’s students were given special privileges.

Ultimately, despite the failure of the 2005 concert, which was organized by the university as an “alternate” event to the Aberdeen Street party, the CSLU still recommended that the university provide another venue for “safe and inclusive” student partying on Homecoming weekend. The CSLU argued that the party should be planned by students who would then hold a stake in its promotion. Furthermore, the committee encouraged “alumni participation and mixing with the current student body”
(Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space 2006:458) at such an on-campus event in order to decrease the homogeneity of the crowd members and lessen the opportunities for “intended violence” (Ohio State University 2003:28) by reducing participants’ anonymity. Theoretically, the suggestion of a student-organized alternative event seemed to present a likely solution to the problem at hand; however, its implementation was largely unrealistic since it would have required extensive efforts, time investments and funding from parties who were unlikely to support the initiative and over whom the committee had no power to influence.

The CSLU’s recommendations were also aimed at strengthening the university’s active discouragement towards “unsanctioned street parties” (Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space 2006:459). Essentially, the committee formulated this recommendation based on assumptions that a Homecoming 2006 gathering on Aberdeen Street would inevitably become riotous if the university did not take control of its students. Firstly, the committee’s call for “Queen’s to set clear expectations about student behaviour” is in itself unclear. Secondly, this recommendation is problematic because of assumptions that Queen’s administrators are able to single-handedly shape student behaviour.

Another CSLU recommendation encouraged Queen’s administrators to “scrutinize their Code of Conduct” (ibid), which outlines student responsibilities, and to assess the effectiveness of the student-run
non-academic discipline system, which assigns sanctions such as fines, suspensions, and expulsions to students who commit serious infractions of the Queen’s Code of Conduct. Essentially, this recommendation is problematic for multiple reasons. For one, the CSLU was in no position to change university policies concerning the student Code of Conduct. Furthermore, the recommendation actually contradicts the committee’s arguments that Queen’s students should be accountable for lawless behaviour just like any other member of the community, since the Code of Conduct is exclusively reserved for Queen’s students.

While the CSLU recommended that the Police Services Board strictly enforce noise by-laws (ibid), the committee also recommended that the police force develop an appropriate “policing model” (ibid) for “those areas of the City heavily populated with students” (ibid). Theoretically, a community-policing model (Skogan 1990) would increase student safety in the ghetto and eliminate the animosity between students and police officers which appears when the two parties only come into contact under negative circumstances. However, this recommendation was ultimately besides the point due to major time restrictions and the Kingston Police Force’s independent agenda for policing the event.

Installing temporary cameras and the use of increased lighting on Aberdeen Street (Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space 2006:459) were two suggestions which committee members also assumed would decrease the potential for disturbances and the onset of a riotous event. Also, in cases where video surveillance does not deter
disruptive behaviour, the use of video footage to incriminate illegal actors after-the-fact would further contribute to the strength of the social control forces and the deterrent effects of the event’s aftermath in preventing future disturbances. Such a selective usage for surveillance is therefore rooted in conservative political agenda aimed at suppressing student celebrations in the student ghetto.

The committee also suggested that city officials and community members join in “welcoming incoming students to Kingston during orientation week” (ibid) in order to build stronger bonds between students and the Kingston community and increase students’ sense of responsibility and duty to respect both public and private property owned by the city of Kingston and its citizens. Overall, this recommendation is problematic since it presumes that welcoming committees would suddenly eliminate conflicts between students and other Kingston residents and relies largely on assumptions that all students are irresponsible.

The disorderly image currently associated with Aberdeen Street and its surrounding streets prompted the committee to recommend that a review of the long-term “enforcement of property standards be made a priority” (ibid:460). While students’ lack of personal investment in properties and residences undoubtedly increases the student ghetto’s structural conduciveness to student partying, time restrictions and an already visible shortage of available property standards enforcement officers undermined this recommendation’s relevance in dealing with the approaching problem in 2006.
Also, since many students are young and living away from home for the first time, the committee suggested the university develop a course geared specifically towards educating students on the local laws concerning “trespassing, noise, blocking streets and liquor offences” (ibid). While this suggestion may be useful in dealing with the problem at hand, the CSLU lacked the resources to implement this suggestion since the sort of educational course proposed would be autonomously governed by the university. Furthermore, this recommendation could take years to develop and would therefore have no effect on upcoming Homecoming events.

Furthermore, the CSLU’s suggestion that the Kingston Planning Committee direct a “planning renewal” (ibid:461) to “foster diversity” (ibid) and “respect heritage” (ibid) was intended increase students’ investment in the neighbourhood. Thus, making the ghetto into a “‘village’ that students and residents could work together at preserving” (Laidlaw and Mehler-Paperney 2006:3) would theoretically “create a healthier community” (ibid) and lessen likelihood of continued destructive Aberdeen Street Homecoming parties. While some committee members were concerned that designating the student ghetto a heritage area would likely “gentrify it” (ibid) and “‘end up displacing the students’” (ibid), the committee’s recommendation to investigate and develop strategies to diversify the neighbourhood was retained. While the committee offered specific path of action in taking on this initiative, such a recommendation was clearly intended to satisfy members of the public demanding the city propose long-term solutions to the problem of student disturbances.
The CLSU also recommended petitioning the provincial government for changes to broader regulations, including the “Municipal Act to permit licensing of multi-tenant housing” (Committee for the Safe and Legal Use of Public and Private Space 2006:461) and the Liquor License Act. These suggestions were intended to address the tenants of problem houses (many of which house upwards of eight non-related student tenants) who purchase large quantities of alcohol to sell at keg parties. Such residential circumstances and alcohol sales allowances are perceived to increase the student neighbourhood’s conduciveness for partying through inevitably rundown property conditions, attractiveness to rowdy tenants, and mass underage and binge-drinking. However, these recommendations were also undermined in the public face of the problem since the CSLU had no jurisdiction over shaping multi-tenant housing and liquor alcohol sales regulations.

Overall, the committee’s proposed plan of action, which theoretically addresses both short and long-term factors contributing to student disturbances, were unrealistic in terms of available resources and jurisdictional powers and ultimately irrelevant in shaping the 2006 Homecoming event. More significant was the committee’s role in reassuring the public of certain political leaders’ attempts to reinforce a positive reputation of the university and the city of Kingston, to increase student, police, and community safety in the student neighbourhoods, and to improve the long-term living conditions in these areas (ibid:458).
MEDIA BUILD-UP

As opposed to the media’s hard-lined threats and condescending warnings geared at deterring large celebratory gatherings during Homecoming 2005, the media messages leading up to the party of 2006 were much more lenient concerning attitudes towards attendance in general. As Homecoming weekend approached, the CSLU report was delivered to Kingston City Council; however, local media outlets became less and less interested in its findings and recommendations. The committee’s proposals were immediately marginalized in place of initiatives unveiled by Queen’s administrators in collaboration with the AMS, a volunteer group of Kingston residents, and the Kingston Police Force. Since it was not clear for whom the committee spoke, other groups’ efforts to take ownership of the event were received positively by local media sources, which ultimately helped these groups gain public support and facilitated their planning efforts.

Leading up to Homecoming 2006, the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, the *Queen’s Journal, Queen’s Gazette, CKWS TV* regional news, and a variety of other local news sources did not aggressively urge “students to steer clear of street parties” (Bacci 2006a:para1). Instead, these media outlets focused most coverage on describing initiatives intended to encourage responsible behaviour and appropriate party norms, such as transferring beer from bottles to plastic cups, respecting police officers and volunteers, and not driving under the influence of alcohol (Kershaw 2006:1; Jemison 2006a:3; Bacci 2006c:1). Other than one full page editorial published in
the Whig-Standard which argued that “Queen’s students cause more problems for this city than the criminals in Kingston Pen” (MacDonald Dillon 2006:5), this local paper geared largely towards Kingston’s non-student residents, presented a relatively objective view of the upcoming Homecoming celebrations. Instead of making speculations about another riot, the Whig-Standard placed an emphasis on the optimistic outlook and anticipated success of the strategic initiatives planned by university administrators, members of the AMS, the mayor, resident volunteers and the police force.

Along the same lines, the Queen’s Journal and another Queen’s student-run newspaper, Golden Words, both published messages that students “‘would appreciate’” (Wheatly 2006:12), including letters by the editors of these two newspapers addressed to their fellow students encouraging responsible behaviour if for no other reason than to spare the student body another year of public condemnation (Kennedy 2006:12; MacCannell 2006:2). Leading up to the Homecoming weekend of 2006, the Queen’s Journal included wide coverage of the university and community initiatives taken to ensure safety at the party (Mehler-Paperny 2006b:1), but also ran stories that subtly warned of the party’s potential risks, including the account of a student who had been severely injured at the 2005 party (Li 2006a:1) and an article outlining the weekend’s increased rates of sexual assault cases (Jemison 2006b:1). As opposed to the Journal’s 2005 lead-up coverage, where the newspaper subtly encouraged attendance at the anticipated event and may have helped fuel
the student sense of strain and frustration concerning the denial of their celebratory “tradition”, the newspaper’s content preceding the 2006 event demonstrated a more balanced reporting strategy, which included running articles and advertisements with “no intention of telling students not to party, but urg[ing] them to consider the consequences of their actions” (“The guilt trip campaign” September 12, 2006:14).

In essence, the media’s lead-up coverage to the Homecoming celebration in 2006 differed largely from the event’s lead-up coverage in 2005, which arguably enhanced the tensions between town and gown and failed to deter participation in the celebratory gathering on Aberdeen Street. Preceding Homecoming 2006, local media sources focused event coverage on the initiatives undertaken by the university, the AMS, a local resident group of volunteers and the Kingston Police Force, while the CSLU recommendations basically vanished from the public view.

**INITIAL PLANNING**

At the same time as the appointed CSLU was charged with compiling recommendations to deal with local student party riots, many local stakeholder groups had already begun formulating their own plans for action to ensure that their primary concerns would be met. Queen’s administrators and the AMS, Kingston resident volunteer group members and Kingston Police Force officers each prepared and acted on separate strategic tactics aimed at increasing student accountability, reinforcing pre-negotiated behavioural norms, and preventing a hostile confrontation between the police force and student partiers. These initiatives, only some
of which were endorsed by the CSLU committee, ultimately shaped the progression of events which encompassed the entire Homecoming weekend.

Initiatives proposed to deter off-campus student partying began to take shape as late as July of 2006, when the Kingston Police Force conducted a survey of the Queen’s neighbourhood residents “to gauge student opinions” (Mehler-Paperny 2006a:4) on police tactics related to Homecoming weekend. The results of this survey revealed that 45 percent of these students hoped for a decreased police presence with a higher tolerance level, 15 percent lobbied for a “more approachable” (ibid) police force, while only five percent proposed an increased police force with decreased tolerance levels. The survey was merely intended to solicit “advice” (ibid) and promote the police force’s image as “friendly and approachable” (ibid) to the student population. Police Chief Bill Closs justified this early move as an attempt to foster the gradual improvement of the force’s relationship with the Queen’s student population. At the same time these survey results were published, members of the Kingston Police Force also revealed that their preparations for the Homecoming weekend, which were already at this point in time “‘pretty well developed’” (ibid), included supplying police officers with helmets and tasers for use if absolutely necessary, calling in a tactical SWAT team to Kingston for the weekend, and organizing preventative DUI (driving under the influence) check points in the Queen’s student neighbourhood for the Saturday night of Homecoming. The force also affirmed that it would continue to clarify
and publish “‘some examples of what the participants of Homecoming
don’t want to do’” (ibid) in the local media sources right up until the
Homecoming weekend.

Queen’s administrators and members of the AMS also acted on
their own terms in the initial planning stage of the 2006 Homecoming
event. Before the CSLU recommendations were presented to City Council,
the Queen’s administrative officials had already appointed and offered
funding to a group of Queen’s Commerce students responsible for
developing a peer-pressure-based campaign, termed “Under the Kilt” to
promote and encourage examples of acceptable celebratory behaviour
(Jemison 2006a:3). These initial plans were kept confidential until the
beginning of September, when this group launched its promotion by
posting advertisements around campus and handing out candy and other
prizes in exchange for a student’s promise to visit the group’s website,
www.underthekilt.ca. Although it is difficult to determine the number of
students who logged onto the web page, the site did garner media attention
and incite curiosity around campus. The campaigners, who did not intend
“to ‘school’, ‘lecture’ or ‘brainwash’” (ibid) students “on the
values/merits/benefits of being good at homecoming” (ibid), used
humorous videos encouraging students to display school spirit, refrain
from inviting out-of-towners, trade in beer bottles for cups and to “party
hard, but don’t make it hard to party” (ibid). Although supported by
Queen’s administrators, this initiative was ultimately developed by
students to appeal to students since university officials asserted that it was
“not realistic to expect the administration to be able to control the students’ actions” (ibid).

Also, despite Principal’s Hitchcock’s doubt in the Queen’s administration’s ability to shape student behaviour, she still supported a plan for university officials to design a set of posters emblazoned with images from the 2005 Homecoming party accompanied by messages intended to encourage students “to think more critically” (Bacci 2006b:1) about attending street parties during Homecoming 2006. These “bold ads” (ibid), which displayed slogans such as “It’s not a car…it’s your degree that’s getting trashed” (ibid) and “It wasn’t the five idiots on the car who made the headlines…it was the 5,000 ‘innocent bystanders’ who cheered them on” (ibid), were posted all over the Queen’s campus and ran as full page advertisements in local newspapers leading up to the 2006 Homecoming weekend.

Queen’s administrators and residence co-ordinators also attempted to decrease the number of out-of-town visitors to the University over the Homecoming weekend. The decision to prohibit out-of-town visitors from residence buildings during Homecoming weekend (Wheatley 2006a) was intended to reduce the number of non-local student participants in the Homecoming events since these visitors were singled out by many as instigators of trouble during the Homecoming disturbance of 2005 (Elliot 2006b).

Furthermore, during the months leading up to the Homecoming weekend, members of the Queen’s AMS Judicial Committee worked with
Queen’s administrators to assess the student-run non-academic discipline processes and implement changes that would create faster, harsher punishment for students caught breaking the Queen’s Code of Conduct (Queen’s University Senate 2006b). Actual changes to the process were minimal; however, Queen’s administrators reported that the non-academic discipline system had been fine-tuned and would consequently extend its bounds to the investigation of complaints involving not only criminally-based grievances, but also any cases of student behaviour that could negatively affect Queen’s public relations. Such changes indicate that this initiative was aimed mainly at improving the Queen’s administrative image in the face of public relations.

Also, as Homecoming weekend neared, it became apparent that university officials, whose efforts were exhausted on maintaining the Queen’s image in local and national media, had relinquished their power in shaping the event to members of the AMS whose interests lay in supporting the unsanctioned party on Aberdeen Street. Subsequently, a joint appeal by Queen’s administrators and members of the AMS was made to close Aberdeen Street to vehicular traffic on the Saturday night of Homecoming weekend. This request, which police officers agreed “would decrease potential conflicts between officers and students” (Press 2006b:2), was passed by city council on August 22nd, 2006 (Press 2006a). While this proposed action was also accompanied by requests to simultaneously exempt the noise by-law in the student ghetto, which AMS representatives defended as an act which would relieve police officers of
another source of conflict, city officials rejected this appeal, claiming that
“allowing people to make more noise until 2 in the morning” (Hutchins 2006:1) would officially endorse a large party on Aberdeen Street.

Furthermore, preventative steps taken by Kingston city officials and members of the Kingston Police Force to alter the physical character of Aberdeen Street before the Homecoming party included increased street lighting and the installation of surveillance cameras (Lunman 2006). Announcements of these new surveillance measures, which would decrease participant anonymity and increase one’s chances of facing sanctions for misbehaviour, were intended to deter “entrepreneurs” (Buettner 2003:175) - those looking to cause trouble- from attending the celebrations.

Finally, a “volunteer group to mingle with partiers during Homecoming weekend” (Mehler-Paperny 2006b:1) was initiated by Kingston resident and Queen’s alumnus, Vinni Rebelo. Rebelo and other early members of this self-appointed “task force” (ibid) hoped to attract 500 to 1,000 volunteers to set positive examples for partiers (Mehler-Paperny 2006b:12), mainly by encouraging partygoers to “exchange their glass beer bottles for plastic cups”( ibid:1) and offering to walk them home once they were visibly intoxicated.

In the lead up to the Homecoming event, members of the volunteer group, who were planning on wearing red hats to make themselves visible in the crowd, announced that they had no intention of breaking up the students’ party; instead their purpose would be to “decrease the animosity
that built up between some party-goers and police” (ibid:12) at the 2005 Homecoming party, while ensuring that students “‘respect the city, respect the property, respect the University’” (ibid). Such public announcements undoubtedly played a large role in shaping the 2006 Homecoming event since this group endorsed attendance and ensured a higher level of participant safety.

SUCCESS REDEFINED

When the CSLU’s power was eventually undermined by various interest groups, so was the committee’s conservative definition of a successful Homecoming weekend. In the public face of the Homecoming preparations, success was subsequently redefined by spokespeople for the university, the AMS, the resident volunteer group and the Kingston Police Force in terms of producing a non-riot event. In fact, the symbolic success of these groups’ efforts relied largely on the emergence of an unsanctioned gathering upon which safety-oriented prevention tactics could be applied.

QUEEN’S HOMECOMING 2006 EVENT TRANSACTIONS

The 2006 Queen’s Homecoming weekend was the largest local Homecoming celebration to date, drawing an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 people to the Kingston student ghetto. Celebrations began early as scattered parties emerged throughout the student ghetto on Friday, September 15, much to the surprise of Kingston police officers, who were not expecting such a large turnout. As celebrations on the Friday night of Homecoming in the past few years have been generally calm and insignificant, this year’s “early burst of activity” (Elliot 2006c:para6)
generated an unprecedented number of criminal charges (10) and liquor-act violations (230). Anticipating a much larger and potentially problematic gathering on Saturday night, police officers were quick to enforce laws on Friday night and draw partiers’ attention to the video surveillance system which was already set up on Aberdeen Street- the site of past Homecoming disturbances.

THE ASSEMBLING PROCESSES

After a full night of partying on Aberdeen and its surrounding streets, many students and alumni awoke early to begin another long day of cheering, drinking, and socializing. At 10 a.m. on Saturday, pancake keggers were already crowded with intoxicated partiers, and half a dozen police officers set out on foot to issue tickets for liquor-law infractions and fire-code violations. Officers in police cars also visibly patrolled the entire student neighbourhood at this time, carefully monitoring the street gatherings and house parties that continued to pop up in the student ghetto all morning.

After noon, many people dropped into keg parties for a few drinks before heading to the once-again sold-out Queen’s football game. A tent organized and operated by members of the AMS which offered celebrants free water bottles and acted as a home base for the beer bottle exchange was already in full operation by 1 p.m. This stand was also set up strategically to protect the only family residence on Aberdeen Street. Members of the Rebele’s volunteer initiative, who collaborated their efforts with members of the AMS, arrived early in the day and began to
mingle with partiers, many of whom were wearing t-shirts screen-printed with slogans such as “Don’t hate me because I go to Queen’s”, “Flips cups, not cars” and “Save a car, flip me over”. Resident, student and alumnus volunteers also spoke with alumni who were out on Aberdeen all day long cheering, drinking, and decorating current students with colourful beaded necklaces tagged with the slogan “I’ve been ravaged by a golden savage”.

**THE TEMPORARY GATHERING**

As the day progressed, many partygoers attempted to renew their energy for the evening celebrations. By mid-afternoon, some partiers even pulled mattresses and couches out onto their front lawns to rest and nap without being excluded from the large street party which continued to grow as the night drew closer.

By early evening, evidence of a large student and alumni presence and the intermingling of these two groups in the student ghetto could be seen in the mass transfer of Mardi Gras beads from alumni to students, the already noticeable number of discarded red beer cups littering the streets, and the sudden density of celebrants lining the porches and balconies of the houses on Aberdeen Street. After the football game, fans retreated back to the area on and surrounding Aberdeen to continue partying. The city’s decision to close Aberdeen Street to traffic rendered the appearance of a less crowded party area since people gathered freely on the street early on, instead of being herded onto lawns and sidewalks as they had been in the past. The increased number of house parties along Johnson Street and University Avenue also lessened the appearance of congestion at the
Saturday night celebrations. However, the event attracted nearly twice as many participants as it did in 2005.

By the time 8 p.m. rolled around, over 220 police officers patrolled the crowded student neighbourhood surrounding Aberdeen Street. Some officers monitored the party activities, while others bordered the area with RIDE checkpoints and pulled over passing cars to ensure drivers were not intoxicated. Foot patrol officers in the student ghetto maintained the “laid-back policing style” (Armstrong 2006a:para5) they had employed all day and chatted amicably with party-goers, intervening only when they were called upon by concerned volunteers and officers monitoring the mounted surveillance system, or when celebrants were blocking traffic on Johnson Street. Essentially, police officers employed an approach intended to “allow the party to occur on Aberdeen Street in the way past partygoers wanted it to happen” (ibid). Since the street was closed, officers were not forced to concentrate their efforts on keeping people on the lawns and sidewalks, but instead were able to focus on ensuring that other laws were upheld. For example, partiers were “allowed to drink on private property, but those who openly consumed alcohol on the street were asked to dump the contents or face a fine” (ibid).

Although, at this point in the evening, many crowd members were visibly intoxicated and had begun to chant the familiar “Ole, Ole” song, the gathering was not perceived as a threat to public safety; therefore, police officers allowed the celebration to run its course. Furthermore, the officers’ “large yet non-confrontational presence appeared to have a
sobering effect on the crowd” (ibid), as the tension levels apparent at the 2005 Homecoming event were nowhere to be found. In fact, many students even insisted on shaking officers hands and some even asked officers to pose for pictures (Mehler-Paperny 2006c:1). Public denouncement following the sound of a single beer bottle smashing to the ground further testified to the crowd’s collective shift in character from the previous year; after this incident, instead of imitating this act or remaining silent, members of the crowd booed and began to chant: “‘We fucked up, we fucked up!’” (Armstrong 2006a:para26).

At 10 p.m., the party was well underway, with partygoers on Aberdeen Street contained by metal barriers which blocked the street from traffic on either end. At the end of Aberdeen where it is contained by Earl Street, a marked police surveillance van and a few unmarked police vehicles were surrounded by groups of officers keeping to the borders of the party area. Inside the surveillance van, three men from the Toronto Police Service surveillance team supervised the party scene (ibid). Each of the officers monitored one of three cameras positioned overhead to capture Aberdeen’s entire length. These officers were able to pinpoint troublemakers by using a joystick to rotate each camera 360 degrees while employing an extended zoom function (ibid). Although many partygoers may have been on their best behaviour due, in large part, to their prior knowledge of these surveillance measures, there is a chance that some participants at the party on Aberdeen were not fully aware of the mounted cameras or their abilities, since the signs indicating their presence were
mounted very high on the street’s light posts. This lack of awareness, which also likely characterized the “record number of people from out of town” (Elliot 2006c:para2), may have resulted in the unruly behaviour of a few participants which led to their immediate extraction from the crowd. Those who were merely engaging in rowdy drinking games and “chugging” beer bongs from second floor balconies were not removed from the crowd; however, a few people who set off fireworks and instigated fights threatened the safety of other crowd members and volunteers and were therefore pulled off the street by police officers and subsequently reprimanded.

When night fell on Aberdeen Street, “there were few dark spaces” (Armstrong 2006a: para50) since the number of street lights had not only been doubled, but their “wattage was increased” (ibid). Furthermore, the “first-aid station in a small parking lot at the top of the street also hosted two bright spotlights, which illuminated the area like a nighttime football game” (ibid:para51). These initiatives decreased the anonymity of partygoers on Aberdeen Street and also facilitated the volunteers’ “efforts to get glass bottles out of the crowd” (Elliot 2006c:para1) and to send “‘a vibe to people that they should drink responsibly’” (ibid:para25). The volunteers, who spent the entire evening exchanging cups for beer bottles, passed out over 2,400 bottles of water and countless bags of popcorn (Cheung and Harrison 2006:1). There were virtually no conflicts between the volunteers and the students; in fact, the volunteers received thanks all night from Queen’s students and other partygoers who commended
volunteer efforts to keep the street clean and safe for the participants. At one point in the evening “spontaneous applause broke out” (ibid:3) for the volunteers; and, in another instance, a group of partiers started chanting “‘Chug your beers for the volunteers!’” (ibid).

After midnight, the party on Aberdeen Street peaked both in terms of attendance and rowdy behaviour. Once the crowd swelled on Aberdeen Street, the RIDE program was shut down and the officers stationed at the various checkpoints surrounding the student neighbourhood were summoned to support the officers already patrolling the street party (Armstrong 2006a). Although the crowd’s density appeared to sustain itself, throngs of people travelled all over the ghetto to other parties on Johnson Street and University Avenue. Subsequently, some officers began walking up and down Johnson, politely herding people back onto the sidewalks to keep the busy road clear for passing traffic. Most people obeyed the officers’ requests, while the few who blatantly resisted and deliberately caused problems were arrested and handcuffed by police officers. Throughout the course of the evening, members of the police force only used a taser on one partier after he incited trouble and then violently resisted arrest (Li 2006b:1).

Despite a few unexceptional negative incidents, the “overall mood” (Mehler-Paperny 2006c: 1) of the party was perceived by most participants and observers to be “safer and less hostile than 2005” (ibid). One student cited the lack of glass on the street as the main difference in his mind between the gathering of 2005 and this one: “‘you don’t hear the sound of
shattering glass, you hear the cracking of plastic cups”” (ibid). The mass bottle exchange also ensured that the Fist Aid tent was not overwhelmed with serious injuries; instead, workers tended to only minor cuts all evening. Frontenac Paramedic Services workers, who also responded to injuries in the Aberdeen area, attended to approximately twelve people by 11:20 p.m. and continued to offer aid throughout the evening, although no serious student, volunteer, or police injuries were recorded (Armstrong 2006a). Furthermore, calls for aid were not nearly as problematic to answer as they were at the 2005 Homecoming party: “despite the congestion of the street, paramedics were having ‘no trouble’ getting through the crowds…to reach people in need” (Mehler-Paperny 2006c:2).

Some observers noted that from 12 a.m. until about 3 a.m. on Sunday morning, “Aberdeen looked like Woodstock” (Petrick 2006:1), as partygoers became increasingly intoxicated and lively. However, for the most part, the disorder at the party did not progress pass the extent of a few empty beer cans thrown into the crowd. Although noisy and undoubtedly bothersome for many local residents, the party did not turn riotous. However, the largely non-confrontational party atmosphere did not stop appalled resident and former City Councillor Don Rogers from spending the night “pacing the sidewalks around Aberdeen Street” (Armstrong 2006a:para38) to protest the “relaxed policing of liquor laws” (ibid). He campaigned all evening to try to convince the police to use force to disperse the gathering. On the other hand, Mayor Harvey Rosen, who attended the event to observe its effects, deemed Aberdeen a site of
“controlled chaos” (Mehler-Paperny 2006c:2), and further stated that at that point things were “going as planned” (ibid) and that “hopefully we’ll wake up on Sunday and we’ll have another Homecoming behind us without a lot of to-do” (ibid).

THE DISPERSING PROCESSES

At the end of the night, although police officers had made more arrests than they had during the 2005 Homecoming event, many people argued that this year’s attempts to deter another riot were ultimately successful (Armstrong 2006a). From 7 a.m. on Saturday until 7 a.m. on Sunday, police officers had made a total of 58 arrests—seven of which lead to criminal charges—and had written up 237 tickets for liquor law violations (Mehler-Paperny 2006c:1). The day’s arrests included 42 for public intoxication, 13 for breach of the peace, two for assaulting a police officer, and one for resisting arrest, while the infringements of liquor laws encompassed offences of “public intoxication, having open liquor, drinking under age and having open liquor while driving” (Armstrong 2006a:para14). While most partiers headed home after the celebrations, over 50 people spent the night in jail (ibid).

At around 3 a.m., the crowd remaining on Aberdeen Street showed a significant reduction in density, as straggling groups of partiers dispersed when the celebration had seemingly ended. Police officers and remaining volunteers allowed the party to dwindle down, and by 4 a.m. all but a few participants lingered. However, the street was still active until 5 a.m. as some volunteers and members of the Queen’s AMS remained to shovel
and collect the hoards of garbage and trampled plastic cups which covered the street (Cheung and Harrison 2006:1,3).

Before partiers awoke on Sunday morning, Aberdeen Street had been completely swept of any debris and there was not a piece of glass in sight. Red plastic beer cups, crushed and flattened, were still scattered over the lawns and porches, but were relatively scarce in proportion to the number of partiers who had joined in the Saturday night celebrations. Although nearly all physical evidence of a neighbourhood party which rendered “plenty of noise, plenty of arrests, plenty of drunks” (Petrick 2006:1) had vanished, the party did, once again, leave a mark on many members of the Kingston community that would not be erased overnight.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter examined the processes by which a moral panic was constructed following the Aberdeen Street Homecoming disturbances of 2005 and the role that local politics played in shaping the 2006 Homecoming celebrations. After reviewing the reactions of Queen’s students, Queen’s administrators, Queen’s alumni, long-term Kingston residents and Kingston police officers, a variety of conflicting interests and political agendas were identified in terms of interpreting and responding to the problem. Especially since it was an election year, Mayor Rosen and other members of Kingston’s City Council opted to satisfy public concerns that action be taken to deal with the pressing problem of unsanctioned student parties in residential areas. Subsequently, this chapter describes the political processes under which the CSLU was formed, outlines the various
complications which emerged throughout the committee’s term, and accounts for the implementation of stakeholder initiatives which emerged to secure independent interests in regards to the Homecoming event.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Nearly a year after the riotous 2005 Homecoming weekend incited mass public concern and landed Queen’s University a rank among other notorious party schools, all eyes returned to Aberdeen Street for Homecoming 2006. Despite the short time period separating the two events, many observers and hopeful participants expected the annual celebration to exhibit large changes which would silence public apprehension concerning the future of the event. Others remained doubtful that any initiatives implemented over the course of one year would affect the nature of such a reputedly disorganized and unruly gathering which, unsanctioned to begin with, could only get worse. While Homecoming 2006 managed to evade the negative media attention which followed Homecoming 2005, the Homecoming celebrations of 2006 attracted an even larger crowd, spanned a wider radius in the residential area, and incurred higher costs than ever before. Nonetheless, the new event circumstances were largely revered and the event was publicized as a success.

After examining the case of Queen’s Homecoming 2006 and its implications, this chapter summarizes broader interpretations of celebratory riots which have emerged in recent literature. Such explanations encompass a variety of social, psychological, cultural and demographic factors which undoubtedly play a large part in shaping these student disturbances. Following these interpretations, this chapter speculates about the future of Queen’s Homecoming and Aberdeen Street.
Finally, this chapter presents a number of unanswered questions along with suggestions for future research regarding celebratory riots.

**QUEEN’S HOMECOMING 2006: AFTERMATH AND DISCUSSION**

While the Queen’s Homecoming celebration of 2006 was deemed a success by members of the Queen’s AMS, Queen’s administrators, Mayor Harvey Rosen, many Homecoming volunteers, and a large number of Queen’s students, others disagreed, claiming that the event was still largely problematic but was merely perceived as successful in opposition to the riotous Homecoming gathering of 2005. What happened in 2006 was, to many, undoubtedly preferable to the incidents of 2005; however, concerns arose nonetheless that the community, the police and the university should not have to settle for the lesser of two evils when it comes to student behaviour at illegal street parties.

On one hand, the 2006 party on Aberdeen Street was very different from the 2005 celebrations: there was a collaborative movement to take ownership of the event and to implement measures geared towards preventing a riot; there was no palpable sense of confrontation between students and police; there was no build-up of broken beer bottles throughout the night; and there was no car-flipping or fire-setting in the student ghetto. However, aside from these major differences, the two celebrations were actually very similar in character: both events drew unprecedented crowds of intoxicated young adults, many of whom were underage and out-of-towners; both events required massive police presence and demanded heightened community tolerance levels; and both events
increased the celebration’s visibility and its potential for future expansion in both size and spread. Ultimately, although some agreed that the 2006 event was a step in the right direction, many local stakeholders still perceived the “non-riot” as problematic for a number of reasons.

**OWNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION**

The 2006 event precursors contrasted significantly with the previous year’s Homecoming precursors during which the AMS, the university, the community, and the police force were all reluctant to take ownership of and responsibility for shaping the event. Aside from incensed students desperately defending “their” party, there was little visible preventative action taken to shape the Aberdeen Street event of 2005. On the other hand, leading up to the 2006 Queen’s Homecoming weekend, many initiatives were undertaken by various groups vying for ownership whose members attempted to shape the celebration in ways by which they would most systematically benefit. Eventually, these groups came together to plan a safety-oriented event and implemented measures geared at reducing the potential for confrontation between students and police, which was perceived by many as the main reason for the 2005 gathering’s shift from crowd to riot.

In 2006, the police and the university both relinquished a significant amount of power to the AMS and the volunteer force when it came to preventative crowd interaction and norm-shaping. According to contagion, normative and rational-choice theories, the event was likely to attract young people, especially those “vulnerable to influence” (Klapp
1969:41) who would then act on a combination of motives rooted in the crowd’s degree of unification (McPhail 1969; Turner and Killian 1972; Vider 2004), pressure to conform to visible norms (Fox 1987; Turner and Killian 1972), and personal cost-benefit analyses (Berk 1974; Dollard and Miller 1980; Lang and Lang 1970; Raiffa 1982).

When explaining individual action within the crowd, it is also imperative to analyze behaviour through the use of an event-centred model such as Smelser’s (1972) Value-Added framework. Following such a theoretical interpretation, the 2006 Homecoming party remained conducive to drawing a large crowd since student groups claimed ownership of the event and subsequent student-run initiatives reduced the sense of strain which was a major contributor to the riotous atmosphere of the 2005 gathering. While the 2005 event was preceded by unsuccessful warnings issued by university administrators and the Kingston police force, the Homecoming party in 2006 followed positive peer pressure tactics put into effect by student leaders, student groups, and tolerant volunteer residents. Participant conformity in 2006 indicates support for Ellis and Keedy’s (1970) argument that admired leaders are more effective than mere authority figures in controlling and shaping student behaviour.

In addition to providing non-ambiguous norms and thus theoretically decreasing the potential for a spontaneous emergence of unruly action within the crowd, such student-led initiatives to take ownership of the event also eradicated the development of student strains which in 2005 stemmed from what participants perceived as unjustified
authoritative attempts to deprive students of a Queen’s “tradition” - the party they felt entitled to hold and attend. Thus, according to event-centred theories, such ownership-rooted initiatives acted as event precursors, subsequently shaping the crowd atmosphere and the individual participant behaviour further explained by contagion, normative, and rational choice theories.

**IMPROVED POLICE-STUDENT RELATIONS**

The police force’s increased numbers and extended hours of visibility in the student ghetto alongside the adoption of a more lenient, removed presence undoubtedly prevented the onset of a spontaneous hostile confrontation similar to that which occurred in 2005. According to contagion, normative and rational-choice theories of crowd behaviour, an increase in officers prepared the police force for the onset of a spontaneous riot which could stem from contagious forces, unruly emergent norms or a widespread perception of anonymity facilitating “intended violence” (Ohio State University 2003a:28). However, according to event-centred crowd theories, a relaxed police presence also eliminated strains at the event which tend to instill an “us versus them” (ibid) mentality. The tactics exercised by police officers in 2006 were largely characteristic of many community policing models, which favour the pro-active “cooperative action for the prevention of crime” (Alderson 1982:136) over the reliance on reactive responses to visible misconduct. Event-centred crowd explanations, along with rational-choice theories, suggest that such
approaches reduce the potential for riotous event outcomes (Berk 1974; Kelling and Wilson 1982).

Ultimately, community policing approaches recognize the “problems caused by police estrangement from the communities they serve” (Skogan 1990:89). Such problems are evident in the Queen’s student neighbourhood in Kingston, as students rarely come into contact with police officers, and when they do it is largely limited to negative and defensive situations, as was the case at the Homecoming confrontation in 2005. Accordingly, some students publicly justified their resistance to police efforts at dispersing the crowd in 2005 by citing a year-round lack of police concern for student grievances. This perception inevitably increased student lack of respect for police officers as authority figures. Sacco and Kennedy (2008) argue that such negative relationships act as precursors to behaviour at crowd events, since participants are subsequently unlikely to conform to police requests, but are instead more likely to defend and join in the actions of fellow crowd members (Lang and Lang 1970).

In line with event-centred theories’ suggestions to eliminate trust issues and to improve such relations prior to the 2006 event, the Kingston Police Force took on a community-policing inspired model in the weeks leading up to and during the Homecoming 2006 weekend. This course of action included surveying student residents on preferred policing approaches to the student neighbourhood, stationing foot patrol officers in the student ghetto and collaborating efforts and resources with other
residents and community groups who were also working towards similar goals. To this effect, patrolling officers at the 2006 celebrations maintained an approachable, non-discriminatory, and safety-oriented public image. Subsequently, the shift in the police force’s approach rendered dramatically improved celebratory conditions and simultaneously eliminated the justification for acts of “opportunistic criminality”\(^9\) (Rosenfeld 1997:498) at the 2006 Homecoming event. Ultimately, order was maintained in the rational crowd due to precursory negotiations between the different parties involved (Raiffa 1982:8).

**ELIMINATION OF BROKEN GLASS**

While the thick layer of broken beer bottles which covered Aberdeen Street during the 2005 Homecoming party was responsible for a number of injuries, for hindering police and emergency workers’ mobility, and for increasing public perceptions of danger and of student disrespect for the community, the implementation of a bottle exchange system at the 2006 Homecoming event resulted in major improvements relating to event safety and order.

Instead of proposing a ban on beer bottles at the party, which would have been hard to broadcast and even harder to enforce, the AMS organized a volunteer-run bottle drive. While contagion theories propose that the successful bottle drive could just as easily have failed, normative theories contend that such an initiative worked due to the event’s peer

\(^9\) Rosenfeld (1997:498) used this term to describe the nature of the “widespread looting” which took place during the Chicago Bulls riot. He argued that the store raiding resulted from “the aggregation of individual decisions to take advantage of celebratory chaos” (ibid).
pressure-based demands to hand bottles over to volunteers. Rational choice theories may also argue that the mere presence of an outlet for disposal guaranteed the bottle drive’s success, since the decision to drop bottles to the pavement is made when there is no easier method by which to dispose of debris at the event. Event-centred crowd theories also warn that hazards such as glass bottles at crowd events are precursors which contribute to the gathering’s conduciveness for subsequent danger and disorder. By enforcing norms prior to the event, volunteers were able to spread positive rumors regarding the bottle exchange and were able to eliminate the emergence of ambiguity concerning glass disposal at the party site for both local and out-of-town crowd participants (Shibutani 1966). Furthermore, by eliminating the glass bottles at each participant’s disposal prior to the point at which an occasion or opportunity might arise to use these bottles as dangerous weapons, toys or props to gain attention, members of the AMS and the volunteer group were able to thwart common disorderly acts within the crowd which may have then instigated larger acts of destruction including fire-setting, fights, injuries and even death.

**LACK OF PRECIPITATING EVENT**

The lack of a precipitating event at the 2006 Homecoming gathering also ensured a different outcome than that of the previous year’s celebration-turned-riot. In 2005, the major precipitating incident consisted of the overturning and burning of the car on Aberdeen Street. After the car was flipped, the event changed in many ways: norms became unclear, the sight of such a spectacle drew bystanders to the scene, and authorities were
forced to take aggressive action. Subsequently, this act alone incited mass movement, increased volume, and blurred messages within the crowd. Furthermore, when police and firefighters moved in, they were met with widespread crowd resistance. It is unclear whether the major precipitating event in 2005 would have occurred if it had not been preceded by a number of smaller precipitating incidents including the initiation of bottle smashing and the first crowd calls to “fuck the police” and rush the street. However, it is clear that the crowd’s atmosphere was largely hostile and anticipatory early on in its transactions.

According to normative, rational-choice and event-centred theories of the crowd, it is also clear that the absence of both major and minor precipitating incidents at the 2006 gathering was not a fluke occurrence. For example, when a single beer bottle audibly smashed to the pavement early on in the evening, crowd members did not cheer or remain silent as they had in 2005. Instead, loud chants professing “We fucked up” circulated throughout the crowd. At this point, it may have become apparent to instigators within the crowd that their attempts to initiate a precipitating event would be unsuccessful. According to Kelling and Wilson (1982), the removed police presence resulted in a heightened sense of responsibility to police fellow students which is, in other cases, often deferred to other authoritative figures.

At the same time, the immediate participation in such chants revealed that a certain degree of contagion did exist within the crowd. However, the implementation of such preventative measures such as a
surveillance system on Aberdeen Street eradicated previously rowdy participant motivations rooted in a sense of anonymity (Kelling and Wilson 1982). In 2006, crowd members had much more to lose, both individually and as a group, if something were to go seriously wrong.

UNPRECEDENTED CROWD SIZE

While the 2006 Homecoming event was in many ways perceived a successful event- especially compared to the riotous 2005 event- the 2006 celebrations were not void of negative implications. One problematic aspect of the 2006 gathering was its unprecedented crowd size and party span. Event-centred theories contend that mobilization for action to the party site was ultimately facilitated by the road closure to traffic, the police force’s lenient tactics, and the unchanged structural conduciveness of the area. While some students cited rational motives of returning to Aberdeen “out of curiosity…‘to see if there would be a riot’” (Mehler-Paperny 2006c:2), the street’s accessibility and safety measures, including the AMS and Queen’s funded portable toilets, First-Aid tent, and water booth, undoubtedly heightened participant comfort levels at the event. Furthermore, rational choices rooted in the assessment of previous events’ aftermath suggest that the lack of visible sanctions for a number of liquor-related offences may have also contributed to the party’s increased participant count. Contagion theories propose that a host of smaller house and lawn parties which emerged along Johnson Street and in other areas of the student ghetto also drew more onlookers to the larger party on Aberdeen Street. Finally, despite the university’s ban on guests in
residence during Homecoming weekend, the 2006 event still drew a large number of out-of-towners. Overall, event-centred and rational choice theories argue that the unchanging availability of resources such as free time, purchasable alcohol, the event’s details, and access to its site guaranteed mass mobilization to the 2006 party (Berk 1974; Rose 1982; Smelser 1972). Subsequently, the 2006 event was in some ways worse than the riot of 2005; Homecoming 2006 rendered more noise, more litter, heightened preventative and resultant costs to the city of Kingston and its taxpayers and ultimately set the standard for years to come.

**ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE**

Furthermore, public doubt regarding increased safety during Homecoming weekend was cemented by the visible intoxication of many party-goers at the 2006 Homecoming event. While the AMS and the volunteer group distributed water bottles and popcorn to celebrants on Aberdeen Street with the intention of slowing participant intoxication, such measures did not prevent underage and binge drinking which occurred all day long at the party site.

While normative and rational choice theories contend that these students are likely to engage in frequent binge drinking anyways almost every weekend at off-campus parties or bars (Henry and Eaton 1999; Parker and Williams 2003), many people were still reluctant to endorse such alcohol-related activities on Aberdeen Street by way of such justifications. Event-centred theories look to the aftermath which results from a crowd event. Since the event’s conduciveness to drinking was
heightened with the relaxed policing of alcohol by-laws, the event’s alcohol-related consequences could only logically increase. Firstly, mass intoxication at this “unsanctioned” event inevitably renders noisy assemblies which are disruptive for families living in or bordering the student ghetto. Secondly, while the act of distributing red cups is likely to eliminate dangerous broken glass on the streets, the cups themselves also become litter on the streets and lawns of the neighbourhoods adjacent to Queen’s. Despite the AMS clean-up which followed the 2006 party, red cups still littered the ghetto area months after the event had passed. Finally, mass consumption of alcohol in the crowd on Aberdeen Street could have easily rendered serious consequences concerning the safety of participants, many of whom spent most of the party crowded onto dilapidated balconies and rooftops.

**INCREASED COSTS**

Finally, the 2006 Homecoming event resulted in a number of expenses which are likely to increase over the years if the annual celebration carries on as it did in 2006. Increased financial costs to taxpayers and the university, the sacrifice of community services, deteriorated community perceptions of the police, and worsened town-gown relations are just a few of the costs resulting from the “‘controlled’” (Mehler-Paperny 2006c:2) gathering of 2006. First of all, the taxpayer costs attached to policing alone at the 2006 Homecoming weekend exceeded $352,740 (Armstrong 2006b:para16). Although around $140,000 of such costs were covered by donations of services from the Ontario
Provincial Police (OPP) and other police units, the final costs still took a substantial toll on the city’s available budget for other much-needed services in the Kingston community (ibid).

Furthermore, the necessary presence in the student ghetto of over 100 Kingston Police officers and 84 officers from the OPP’s public order unit (Armstrong 2006a) endorsed by event-centred crowd theories also meant that other areas of Kingston were inevitably under-policed during Homecoming weekend. In terms of aftermath, grievances that the local police force was “unwilling or unable to enforce the law” (Mehler-Paperney 2006c:2) were not uncommon among members of the greater Kingston community.

Finally, although Queen’s administrators eventually announced the university’s “donation” of $100,000 to the Kinston Police Force to compensate policing efforts in the student ghetto during Homecoming weekend, many Kingston residents remained at odds with the university and its dispassionate approach to dealing with the Homecoming problem. According to event-centred theories, such grievances inevitably heighten tensions between the stakeholder groups and are likely to lead to increased damages and disruptions at future Homecoming events (Kelling and Wilson 1982).

Overall, in the public face of the problem, the resultant costs of the 2006 Homecoming party were largely undermined by the event’s perceived success. While the event proceeded without resulting in any serious injuries, student confrontations with the police, or negative media
coverage, the costs to local taxpayers, to the Kingston community at large, and to town-gown relations should not be overlooked. Furthermore, the consensus among many partygoers that the event was safer and more enjoyable than in previous years indicates that the costs associated with the annual Homecoming celebrations may actually increase in years to come.

**CELEBRATORY RIOTS: BROADER INTERPRETATIONS**

The emergence of contemporary research focused on celebratory riots involving college and university-aged participants has provided many answers to questions which, until recently, were largely unexplained. Attempts to account for student celebratory riots based explicitly on the use of general crowd theories and interpretations of sports-related disturbances were insufficient as they could not account for the distinct developmental patterns consistently discerned by observers of celebratory student gatherings which become riotous. Comprehensive studies specific to celebratory riots (Buettner 2004; Colorado 2002; Madensen and Eck 2006; McCarthy et al. 2005; McPhail 1994; Ohio State University 2003; Ruddell et al. 2005; University of New Hampshire 2003a) have since uncovered a number of “demographic factors and ideological conditions” (Ruddell et al. 2005:551) common among such student disturbances.

**DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERN**

Empirical findings support event-centred explanations of the celebratory riot. As an outcome of a number of combined factors, a celebratory riot results from “patterns of escalation common to riots of student-aged participants” (ibid). This process begins with an individual’s
desire to achieve the complete student “experience” which entails
time at off-campus student gatherings, experimentation with alcohol,
and the participation in marked university “traditions”. Subsequently,
attendance at gatherings involving alcohol, which at most schools take
place off-campus, often becomes a major part of the student lifestyle. At
schools where densely populated student neighbourhoods bordering the
campus exist, student houses in these areas tend to be preferred as party
venues over local bars.

Furthermore, parties associated with “calendar or holiday events”
(Marx 1970:7) often become “‘institutionalised’ in the sense that
participants and controllers expect them to happen” (ibid). Such advance
notice becomes leads to a larger local attendance than spontaneous
gatherings and often also attracts heightened numbers of participants from
out of town. While police and university officials usually attempt to
prevent ritualized off-campus student gatherings by disseminating
cautionsary messages to students regarding possible sanctions, students
often regard these warnings as empty threats. Subsequent student
gatherings display an “element of fun, kicks, the quest for excitement, and
and a general expressiveness” (ibid) which tends to shift when police officers
arrive at the scene.

At this point, the crowd often expands as increased commotion
attracts passers-by and many participants call their friends to the site. In
some cases “entrepreneurs” (Buettner 2004:174) engage in purposely
unruly behaviour, such as circulating chants or setting fires, in hopes of
sparking a riot. This results in instances of “intended violence” (Ohio State University 2003a:28) to which police officers respond with escalated tactics and increased force.

Attempts to control and disperse such gatherings are also met with resistance from bystanders and other non-provocative participants who become frustrated with police attempts to ruin the party. The crowd event is then shaped by “outcome violence” (ibid) that stems from retaliation by crowd members who feel police intervention is unjustified.

Furthermore, heightened levels of intoxication and aggression within the crowd continue to shape the series of incidents which transpire for the remainder of the evening. Finally, once crowd members disperse, either by choice or by coercion, each participant’s memory of their unique experience within the crowd becomes a major deciding factor of their own and others’ participation in subsequent events. Ultimately, while the celebratory riot is continually shaped by a number of factors which emerge at each stage of the gathering, the event itself then becomes a precursor to future riot events.

**COMMON DEMOGRAPHIC AND IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS**

The developmental pattern common to celebratory riot events stems from the combination of a number of demographic and ideological elements specific to certain student populations. Studies which have interpreted data collected from both riot-associated and non-riot-associated American colleges and universities have consistently uncovered key
factors linked to those schools which have recently experienced student celebratory riots.

**Alcohol, Risk-taking and Off-campus Gatherings**

The “culture of alcohol” (City of Boulder 2002:5) and student tendencies towards risk-taking identified at most North American colleges and universities often leads to presumptions about the heavy roles that these two factors play in the emergence of celebratory riots. However, since studies have shown that various forms of risk-taking, and alcohol-related problems including underage and binge drinking exist at the majority of colleges and universities (Buettner 2004:12), these factors alone cannot explain why some schools experience celebratory riots and others do not. In line with event-centred crowd theories, an analysis of the places where students are most likely to gather and drink alcohol is required in order to account for the role of alcohol and risk-taking in celebratory riots.

Off-campus parties are undoubtedly more conducive to the emergence of celebratory riots since the location of such gatherings often presupposes less supervision and will most likely lead to higher levels of underage and binge drinking than at licensed or on-campus venues.

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10 While “risk-taking and deviancy peak during the young adult years” (Ohio State University 2003:34), such risk-taking need not lead to “violent and destructive behaviour” (ibid:35). Many activities and settings, such as sports matches and other competitive games, can provide young people with a sense of risk taking without involving criminal or destructive acts.

11 Buettner (2004:10) defines binge drinking as the consumption of “five or more alcoholic beverages for males and 4 or more for females in one setting”. Approximately 40% of American college and university students “report that they engage in heavy episodic or ‘binge’ drinking” (Johnston, O’Malley and Bachman 1996 in Buettner 2004:12).
Accordingly, findings indicate that celebratory riots are distinct to schools where students are more likely to drink at off-campus student residencies than at licensed bars, on-campus venues or other locations. Studies suggest that the preference to such venues may be related to bar closures, changes to the legal drinking age or to the enforcement of such laws at local establishments, a trend towards younger student enrollment, or the inability of alternate venues to accommodate large numbers of students (Ohio State University 2003:33).

Furthermore, risk taking at off-campus parties will inevitably take on a different character than it does in other situations. For example, the opportunities for risky behaviour at bars, such as the use of fake identification, are heightened at off-campus locations where actions such as setting fires or throwing bottles may actually render lowered perceptions of risk (Buettner 2004:77).

**Student Housing**

The places where students live and the conditions in which they live are also considered event precursors since they have a distinct effect on the emergence of celebratory riots. First of all, findings indicate that schools which experience celebratory riots tend to house more students in residence halls than do “non-riot” schools (Ohio State University 2003:31). In accordance with this finding, schools associated with student disturbances often report a “flood of residence hall students into the streets off campus as late night disturbances begin to unfold” (ibid:32).
Furthermore, schools experiencing celebratory riots also report the existence of predominantly student-populated neighbourhoods close to campus. These neighbourhoods are notoriously characterized by a “high population density” (City of Boulder 2002:5), deteriorated streets and landscaping, and “neglected and dilapidated structures” (ibid). Student residents in these areas are almost always short-term renters who live with several other students in detached homes designed for single families. Students living in these neighbourhoods consistently report that they feel they have a right to throw large parties. Even though these student hosts claim to “have full intentions of controlling” (Ohio State University 2003:34) these parties, gatherings often draw such large crowds they become unmanageable. Finally, the student neighbourhoods at “riot” schools commonly cite that “absentee landlords” (City of Boulder 2002:5) and a lack of personal financial consequences to students serve to enhance the area’s conduciveness to student disturbances.

Ritualistic Gatherings

Event-centred crowd theories are also useful in explaining celebratory riots since the presence of specific rituals associated with certain holidays, sports matches or festivals frequently characterize schools which experience student celebratory riots. Prior to the riot, these events are celebrated among student groups as “traditions” and are habitually accompanied by “societal signals that typical rules do not apply” (Buettner 2004:172). Since predictable calendar events or holidays including Halloween, St.Patrick’s Day, Oktoberfest and Homecoming (Ruddell et al. 2005:551) have become ritualised at certain schools, events which fall on
these dates tend to draw increasingly larger turnouts as “participants try to
top current records” (Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug
Abuse and Violence Prevention 2003:23). Evidence also suggests that
events which are scheduled or known to land on certain dates attract
increased numbers of participants who perceive opportunities to instigate
precipitating incidents. This finding supports arguments that scheduled
events (as opposed to spontaneous gatherings) also render distinct police
responses which tend to be more severe (Ruddell et al. 2005:551).
Accordingly, schools which report higher numbers of pre-scheduled
gatherings are likely to experience more riots than those schools without
characteristically traditional celebrations.

Furthermore, a sense of student entitlement emerges among many
students who feel their participation at such celebrations constitutes a
“right of passage” (City of Boulder 2002:5). Findings also indicate that at
some student gatherings, “the standoff becomes the objective of
participation, not the event itself” (Ruddell et al. 2005:551). Subsequently,
police confrontation and disorderly outcomes actually become key ritual
elements of celebratory riots.

**Town-Gown Discord**

Schools which experience celebratory riots are also characterized
by a notable sense of disconnect between the college or university and the
local town or city in which the institution is located. Event-centred crowd
theories suggest such negative relationships are in fact precursors to the
riot event. In these towns, ideological differences between students and
members of the community at large tend to cultivate a “love/hate
relationship” (Williams and Nofziger in Ruddell et al. 2005:550) between
the two groups who are each forced to depend upon each other’s services
and to tolerate each other’s disservices. On one hand, many students in
these areas feel that permanent residents are not accepting of them (City of
Boulder 2002:6); on the other hand, many permanent residents believe that
students consistently behave “without consideration for others” (ibid). The
“limited sense of community” (ibid) which is produced from this discord
undoubtedly inhibits the development of mutual respect between students
and permanent residents. While it may be difficult to determine whether
this initial disconnect between town and gown precedes or follows the
emergence of celebratory riots, the continuity of student disturbances
certainly heightens these tensions and hinders each party’s willingness to
negotiate communal behavioural expectations.

“Hype” Surrounding Event

Schools which report consistent celebratory student rioting also
recount the distinct precursory build-up of “hype” surrounding such
events. Gatherings which become disorderly tend to gain notoriety through
the media and through word of mouth both prior to and following the event
(Buettner 2004:173). Advance media attention creates hype which then
attracts many types of participants including curious bystanders,
entrepreneurs and out-of-towners. First of all, the “potential for a
spectacle” (ibid:174) at these highly publicized events attracts those “who
are less inclined to take large risks, but who still have the young adult need
for novelty and to be part of a peer community” (ibid). Secondly, the promise of a large gathering accompanied by “more permissive social norms” (Kleiss 2006:para18) appeals to those looking for trouble and who attend mainly in hopes of inciting a riot. Furthermore, the widespread promotion of such events leads to increased numbers of non-local participants who may travel long distances with heightened expectations of what will occur. The tendency for such events to draw out-of-towners is often cited as a root cause of resultant disorder (ibid; Buettner 2004; Ohio State University 2003; Ruddell et al. 2005). While findings regarding celebratory riots do in fact indicate that local area students tend to be “overrepresented in the crowds” (Ruddell et al. 2005:558) and “underrepresented in arrests” (ibid), the consistently large numbers of non-local participants at both riotous celebratory gatherings and non-riotous celebratory gatherings undermines this argument.

Regardless, the large turnout of out-of-towners at these events provides evidence that technology plays a significant role in shaping disorderly student gatherings. The widespread use of the Internet and cell phones enables out of town participants to plan on attending such events in advance, while mass cell phone communication confirms the event details to local participants who then flock to the site (ibid:551). The hype associated with such disorderly student gatherings also contributes to heightened student expectations regarding future events. Researchers consistently come across “freshman that will say one of the things that they look forward to is their first riot” (Gilyard 2003b:para23).
Disregard for Authority

Finally, schools which experience celebratory riots also report higher perceptions among faculty and staff of a general student disregard for authority which exists prior to the riot event. These reports reveal that students at these institutions do not take administrators or police officers seriously in reference to unsanctioned gatherings as well as a number of other issues. Furthermore, while these schools report a lack of consistent contact between students and local authority figures, the minimal contact which does exist is generally negative and reactive as opposed to proactive and preventative. While many argue that unwarranted police intervention at large gatherings is largely to blame for the onset of celebratory riots, the findings also suggest that general disregard for authority among students is essentially what provokes such confrontations. Since “a number of students who participate do not consider the event a success until there is police intervention” (Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention 2003:22), rioters at these gatherings will often “push until there is a response” (ibid). On the other hand, in cases where police intervention is not widely goaded, negative relations between police and students can be equally detrimental due to a lack of mutual tolerance and willingness to negotiate.

THE FUTURE OF QUEEN’S HOMECOMING AND ABERDEEN STREET

If the past is any indication of the future, it is highly likely that unruly student gatherings on Aberdeen Street will subside within a few years only to reemerge in another decade or so at the heart of whichever
perimeter constitutes the student ghetto at that time. However, due to the party’s “successful” character in 2006, it appears that similar Homecoming events will continue at least into the immediate future and that the celebrations will remain largely on Aberdeen Street but spill out onto its surrounding streets, as was observed in 2006. The “hype” that continues to surround the gathering and the absence of an alternative venue to celebrate the re-instated “tradition” suggest that the party will continue to attract a sizeable crowd during future Homecoming weekends. Broader interpretations grounded in the research on celebratory riots predict three possible outcomes for the future of the Aberdeen Street student gatherings: institutionalization, clampdown measures, or intermittent episodes.

INSTITUTIONALISATION

Although celebratory riots are most often publicly constructed as social problems which need to be eradicated, it is often the case that public reactions amplify the problem. For example, in some places where celebratory riots emerge, the gatherings are actually institutionalized. Large student celebratory gatherings at the University of Wisconsin and Indiana University have recently become regulated by local authorities who now play a large part in the planning of these annual events. Instead of cancelling or taking a hard-lined approach to the annual Halloween party in Madison, Wisconsin after the 2005 celebration “ended violently with police force” (Heidmann 2006:para2), the town’s mayor opted to start charging a five-dollar entrance fee to the party and limit the party’s attendance to 50,000 people.
This path of action, which was agreed on by university representatives, police officers and members of Madison city council, was perceived as the most effective way to control the event which, in 2005, cost taxpayers over $600,000 (ibid). Since most stakeholders in Madison feared that a strict clampdown would incite heightened disorder, institutionalizing the event was conceived of as the most feasible method of changing the nature of the party “little by little” (ibid) in a way that would ensure a “constructive and safe” (ibid) outcome. This approach required extensive planning, public approval and the collaborative efforts of local authorities, university groups and resident groups.

Generally negative local public attitudes concerning the Aberdeen Street party prove the course of action towards blatant institutionalization unlikely in Kingston. While taxpayers might support instituting charges at the Homecoming party to cover costs, the overwhelming criticism of student parties by many residents and city councilors suggests that public endorsement of the event will not arise in the immediate future.

**CLAMPDOWN**

In cases where conservative claims-makers have access to powerful resources and in situations where celebratory riots suddenly pose an immediate and tangible safety hazard, the local course of action results in a city-wide clampdown on student gatherings. Cracking down on celebratory rioting may arise in a variety of forms, including law reform, zero-tolerance policing strategies, and increased university sanctions. Out-of-control Halloween celebrations in 2001 at California State University,
Chico (CSUC), which resulted in five stabbings and a number of sexual assaults in addition to the regularly disorderly outcomes of celebratory student riots, led to an immediate police crackdown (Ruddell et al. 2005:553). At Halloween celebrations in 2002, increased numbers of Chico police officers on foot, motorcycles and horses ensured a “highly visible presence at ground zero” (ibid)- the area surrounding past disturbances. During these celebrations, officers cleared vehicles from the streets, prohibited entrance to out-of-towners, set up a number of DUI checkpoints, readied helicopter support, and took a hard-lined approach to the enforcement of quality of life crimes “such as public intoxication, public urination, (and) underage drinking” (ibid). In addition, the police force stationed a corrections bus on site and decreased local jail populations in order to account for an expected 400 arrests on Halloween (ibid). These planned actions were also highly publicized in local media advertisements featuring threatening verbal warnings and images of riot police arresting partiers (ibid).

In this case, the clampdown course of action produced a “dramatic decrease” (ibid) in attendance and disorderly behaviour; the celebrations rendered only 88 arrests, which is typical for any weekend in Chico. The following year, in 2003, similar strategies were implemented and once again, “no serious incidents were reported” (ibid:554). Like the course of action taken when institutionalizing such events, this approach also required extensive preventative planning and the collaborative efforts of local authorities, university groups and resident groups- although to a
The tentative “success” of the approach taken to the 2006 Homecoming celebrations suggests that a heavier-handed approach to the Aberdeen Street party in Kingston in the immediate future is unlikely. On one hand, district city councilor and “vocal Homecoming critic” (Armstrong 2006b:para14) Bill Glover, who replaced Floyd Paterson, may, on the basis of public pronouncements, support the implementation of harsher police tactics at the event. However, others may veto such a re-modeled zero-tolerance approach to controlling the party which could, in turn, “escalate the rowdy party into an all out confrontational disturbance” (Buettner 2004:80). Accordingly, unless a consistent riotous pattern re-emerges at Queen’s Homecoming events, it is unlikely that police and other authorities will adopt tougher strategies as outlined in the clampdown approach.

**COLLABORATIVE PREVENTION**

A third course of action implemented in response to celebratory riots relies mainly on collaborative preventative tactics without the commercialization which characterizes approaches of institutionalization or the severity associated with clampdown approaches. Collaborative prevention approaches are often taken in towns where problems emerge regarding student disturbances but local police forces are reluctant to use excessive force without widespread public consent. This approach entails a
number of preventative measures, most of which are focused on changing social and situational factors including student attitudes, town gown relations, neighbourhood conditions and the risks associated with misdemeanor. While the collaborative prevention course of action often includes an increased police presence, police officers often delegate some social control responsibilities to other parties, including student groups and community groups. This approach, which has been implemented in Ohio and in Colorado, may take many years to offer visibly significant results but tends to produce relatively quick minor decreases in disorderly behaviour.

The University of Colorado, a school which experienced frequent student celebratory riots in the University Hill neighbourhood (“the Hill”), committed to a long-term plan centered on a collaborative preventative approach involving 33 main initiatives aimed at “revitaliz(ing) the University Hill” (City of Boulder 2002:7). With an emphasis on community policing, this course of action included volunteer neighbourhood cleanups, the construction of a local Community Police Center, increased street lighting, attention to housing and zoning issues and trash problems, and an emphasis on changing the student party culture (ibid). Following such efforts, the University Hill neighbourhood went from September 2000 to December 2001 without a riot- “the longest period since May 1997” (ibid:11). While intermittent episodes of disorderly gatherings continue to emerge, responses to the riot in 2001, which ignited
community condemnation and led to student aid in identifying the troublemakers, “was an indicator that the plan was working” (ibid).

The collaborative prevention approach to celebratory riots outlined above most similarly resembles the recent course of action taken in Kingston regarding the Aberdeen Street disturbances. While this course of action tends to be effective at halting increased destruction at such events, findings indicate that student disturbances do not disappear overnight. Accordingly, the chances of intermittent episodes on Aberdeen Street recurring over time are highly likely.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The first goal of this thesis was to provide a comprehensive description of the recent Queen’s Homecoming celebrations on Aberdeen Street and subsequently ground these disturbances in the broader context of student celebratory riots across North America. The second goal of this study was to provide explanations for these events and speculate about the future of celebratory riots based on varying responses to these largely situational and cyclical incidents. While this thesis offers answers to many important questions, this study is inevitably confined in certain areas by the limitations of previously collected data, case-specific sources, and sometimes conflicting evidence and theoretical interpretations.

Subsequently, many questions remain. Below are a few suggestions for future research pertaining to celebratory riots.

First, one problematic aspect of this study involves the often inconsistent accounts among sources regarding the factors which
necessarily constitute a student celebratory riot. What are the essential

differences between celebratory riots and celebratory disturbances? Do we
group together incidents which occur on-campus, in off-campus

neighbourhoods, and outside city bars if they all involve predominantly

student crowds? What if police do not intervene to incite a violent

confrontation, but a student gathering still renders mass damages to public

and private property? Which motivations for assembly determine whether

an incident is protest-related? While incidents which render heightened
costs in terms of injuries and damages are often termed riots and those
gatherings which result in less damaging consequences are termed
disturbances, these two terms are also frequently used interchangeably,
even in this thesis, because the characteristics which differentiate these
gatherings are hard to isolate until after-the-fact, and even then the
differences are often ambiguous and debatable. Furthermore, since events
are frequently defined differently by the media, students, university
administrators, police officers and by community members, researchers
attempting to compile statistics concerning the frequency, demographic
location and character of such events will undoubtedly run into problems
which may subsequently invalidate findings.

Another problem is the lack of available information concerning
celebratory riots in Canada. While unruly alcohol-related off-campus
incidents have occurred at other institutions across the country, including
Bishop’s, Mount Allison and St. Francis Xavier (Queen’s University
Senate 2006b:3), detailed information is not available in any form that is
easily accessible to researchers. These obstacles lead to many questions surrounding celebratory riots in Canada. At which Canadian institutions and during which celebratory holidays are celebratory riots likely to occur? Are they as prevalent in Canada as they are in the United States? Is there much public concern surrounding these events in Canada? Which police and community tactics have been applied to dealing with such events across the country? In order to further ground the Queen’s Homecoming events in the broader framework, it is essential to determine, more comprehensively, where celebratory riots fit within the Canadian context.

Furthermore, the existence of conflicting findings in the literature on celebratory riots regarding students and their relationship to alcohol points to the need for future research concerning the role alcohol plays, both directly and indirectly, in shaping these events. While weekend-long drinking, binge drinking, and underage drinking are all common to the North American college and university student population, these activities are also prevalent among the non-student population of young adults (Parker and Williams 2003). To what extent does this common culture of alcohol draw non-students and out-of-towners to celebratory riots? Do incidents equivalent to student celebratory riots occur in drinking-related areas which draw large numbers of young adults who are not students? What inhibits or permits such occurrences?

Also, while studies consistently maintain that celebratory riots are “almost always associated with high alcohol consumption” (Ohio State University 2003:7), data collected during one Ohio disturbance in 2003
indicated that those students who were arrested at the gathering were “by self-report and by police report” (ibid:28) not intoxicated. Is this finding characteristic of all or many celebratory riots? If so, what relevance would this knowledge have for community and university response measures at each stage of the event?

Finally, questions surrounding the visible emergence of celebratory riots in the United States alongside a shift upwards in the legal drinking age to 21 have led to inquiries about the possibility of a causal relationship. Subsequently, some researchers (Buettner 2004) have suggested that future studies be directed at investigating celebratory riots in countries such as Canada where the legal drinking age is much lower. While the drinking age across Canada, which varies from 18 to 19, is lower than that of the United States, the vast majority of first- and second-year students in Canada are still underage. Furthermore, recent changes in the Ontario education system have led to an even younger entrance age at many Canadian universities. Therefore, now- more than ever- is an appropriate time to investigate the consequences of a student culture rooted largely in the consumption of alcohol which conflicts quite dramatically with the legal drinking age.

Clearly, the field of study surrounding celebratory riots offers a variety of interesting, multi-disciplinary paths for future research.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study explores how the Queen’s Homecoming student disturbance of 2005 typifies the modern North American phenomenon of
student celebratory rioting. Building on existing inquiries into the nature of contemporary student disturbances (Buettner 2004; McCarthy et al. 2005), this thesis uncovers a set of factors which shaped the Queen’s Homecoming event and the subsequent processes under which this “problem” was addressed. A review of similar cases reveals that the Aberdeen Street case is in no way unique; the recurrence of such disturbances in other university towns often ignites public concern which generates a variety of prescriptive courses for local action. Subsequently, competing interests arise among certain stakeholder groups who then compete for ownership of future events. Public reception of student gatherings which follow the implementation of preventative initiatives is often mixed, with reactions ranging from relief to rage. For some, a non-violent crowd gathering constitutes a “success”; for others, this same occurrence is nonetheless an unsanctioned gathering which merits condemnation.

While riots have existed in all geographic locations and in all historical periods, the expression of such occurrences in the form of student celebratory rioting is relatively new. Following a comprehensive local and national historical review of student unrest and student revelry, this thesis outlines a number of variables common to those student groups and institutions connected with celebratory riots. While this thesis argues that celebratory riots are the product of individual behaviour explained by contagion, normative, and rational-choice crowd theories, this study also concludes that celebratory riot events cannot be fully understood without
rooting such individual-centred interpretations in a more comprehensive event-centred framework which accounts for a number of situational and contextual factors central to the riot event. Such a discovery indicates that the causes of modern student disturbances are ultimately more complex than isolated attempts to explain individual action within the crowd will permit. Sacco and Kennedy’s (2008) notion of the “social event” best depicts the nature of celebratory riots as episodes which can emerge only after a number of circumstantial settings are in place. Smelser’s (1972) Value-Added framework also proves to be useful in locating factors of structural conduciveness, structural strain, generalized beliefs, mobilization for action, and social control which determine individual and crowd action at the riot event. Subsequently, this study identifies the variables which most heavily shape riotous student celebratory gatherings including alcohol consumption and risk-taking, ritualized holiday celebrations, a town-gown divide, increased media hype, and student resistance to police intervention tactics.

The future of Aberdeen Street is yet to be determined. Some remain optimistic about the changes observed in 2006 and predict that student disturbances in Kingston are on the descent. Others foresee and curse the permanence of disruptive Aberdeen Street parties and their heightened costs and damages. I predict the issue will eventually reignite public debate and once again the problem will become a platform for local politics. Most importantly, those who fought to attend and defend the 2005 Aberdeen Street party will continue to revel in their victory long after its legacy is
passed onto new generations of Queen’s students. As for the immediate future of Queen’s Homecoming, perhaps University of Minnesota Police Chief George Aylward put it best: “‘if (celebratory rioting) becomes entrenched in the college undergraduate culture, we’re going to have a heck of a time finding a remedy for it’” (Gilyard 2003a:para5). While we are still unclear about many aspects of this phenomenon, there is one thing we can count on: as long as student celebratory gatherings are perceived to be an essential element of the student life experience, students will continue to fight for the right to party.
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**Table One: Developmental Framework of the Aberdeen Street Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crowd Event</th>
<th>Homecoming 2005</th>
<th>Homecoming 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>Saturday, September 24/05</td>
<td>Saturday, September 16/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Riot</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Aberdeen Street</td>
<td>Aberdeen Street, Johnson Street, surrounding area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crowd Size</strong></td>
<td>5,000-7,000</td>
<td>8,000-10,000</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Advance media attention builds “hype” surrounding the event.</td>
<td>-“Pancake keggers” initiate a full day of alcohol consumption including underage and binge drinking.</td>
<td>-Town-gown relations worsen.</td>
<td>-“Pancake keggers” are held at various locations in the ghetto on Saturday morning.</td>
<td>-Mixed reactions ensue regarding the party’s “success”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Advanced police issue warnings calling for students to avoid “unsanctioned” events.</td>
<td>-Police shut down four keg parties before noon and continue to write tickets and make arrests throughout the day and night.</td>
<td>-Local and national negative media coverage ensues.</td>
<td>-Many small parties emerge throughout the “student ghetto”.</td>
<td>-Many university officials and students praise the party’s increased safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td>-“Alternate event” (free outdoor on-campus concert) is planned.</td>
<td>-Small parties continue to emerge in the “student ghetto” and Aberdeen accumulates a sizeable crowd by early evening.</td>
<td>-Queen’s refuses to contribute to the party’s policing bill.</td>
<td>-Volunteer residents and members of the AMS arrive early to exchange beer bottles for plastic cups.</td>
<td>-Many local long-term residents cite their dissatisfaction with the police force’s lenient tactics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Local police officers are scheduled to work overtime during Homecoming weekend.</td>
<td>-Police call for backup and attempt to keep crowd members off of the street.</td>
<td>-CSLU is formed at City Hall.</td>
<td>-Police officers operate RIDE program and at various checkpoints surrounding student ghetto.</td>
<td>-The party’s cost is calculated to exceed $352,740.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Some crowd members smash beer bottles, chant “Fuck the police”, and eventually</td>
<td>-Queen’s administration pursues temperate advertising campaign to deter student participation.</td>
<td>-In the evening, the party grows and Aberdeen draws an unprecedented number of partiers.</td>
<td>-Queen’s contributes $100,000 to the party’s policing bill.</td>
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<td>-Queen’s student group creates website to spread peer-supported party norms.</td>
<td>-Foot patrol officers employ relaxed</td>
<td>-Media attention is generally positive and fades quickly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>event</td>
<td>details</td>
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<tr>
<td>charge the street.</td>
<td>-A large amount of cell phone “come see the riot” communication follows.</td>
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<td>-The crowd swells with the arrival of students who attended the concert.</td>
<td>-Police officers form “human barricades” to prohibit entry onto Aberdeen.</td>
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<td>-Eventually, a parked car is overturned, danced upon, and set on fire.</td>
<td>-Portable toilets, First Aid station, video surveillance and increased lighting are installed at the party site.</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Police officers form “human barricades” to prohibit entry onto Aberdeen.</td>
<td>-Aberdeen Street closes to vehicular traffic.</td>
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<td>-After many failed attempts, police and fire fighters manage to reach the car and clear the area.</td>
<td>-Local police force doubles with reinforcement from OPP.</td>
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<td>-The day-long party results in 36 arrests, 2 criminal charges and 357 tickets.</td>
<td>tactics, intervening only to remove a handful of participants who set off fireworks in the crowd.</td>
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<td>-Early on, one beer bottle is smashed and the crowd “boos”.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Mass cell phone use jams the cell phone grid from 10:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.</td>
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<td>-Crowd members navigate between Aberdeen and other scattered parties all night.</td>
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<td>-One partier is tasered.</td>
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<td>-The day results in 58 arrests, 7 criminal charges and 237 tickets.</td>
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</table>
Table Two: The Developmental Processes of Celebratory Riots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Precursors</th>
<th>Event Transactions</th>
<th>Event Aftermath</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Approach of a “ritualized” student celebratory event which often coincides with a holiday, festival or sports match</td>
<td>-Drinking begins early in the morning with “pancake keggers”</td>
<td>-Arrests and tickets resulting from the party may result in charges, fines, and/or community service</td>
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<td>-Positive peer reinforcement of the event as both student “tradition” and “right”</td>
<td>-Smaller-scale parties emerge throughout the day, drawing mostly local, out-of-town and high school students</td>
<td>-University sanctions follow</td>
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<td>-Media build-up increases “hype” surrounding the event</td>
<td>-The widespread consumption of alcohol (mostly bottled beer or kegs) usually involves binge and underage drinking</td>
<td>-Damages rendered to local property results in worsened town-gown relations</td>
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<td>-The party date, site—typically a high population density student neighbourhood which borders the university campus— and other important details are communicated widely by word of mouth and the internet</td>
<td>-In the evening, a mass movement of students from on-campus residences to the off-campus party site ensures a sudden expansion of the crowd</td>
<td>-Negative media attention threatens the local university or college reputation</td>
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<td>-Absentee landlords result in neglected and dilapidated student homes</td>
<td>-“Entrepreneurs” often light fires, smash beer bottles, and shout profanities at authorities who arrive at the scene</td>
<td>-Public concern rises and often leads to one of three plans for dealing with future student disturbances:</td>
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<tr>
<td>-University or college administrators and local police officers warn students of potential consequences for participation in unsanctioned events</td>
<td>-Cell phone communication among crowd members continues to draw people to the site</td>
<td>-condoned institutionalisation, harsher police tactics, or the initiation of preventative safety-oriented approaches</td>
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<td>-Such threats are largely dismissed and animosity between students and authority figures heightens</td>
<td>-Crowd growth and individual acts of unruliness (“intended violence”) incite police intervention</td>
<td>-Each participant’s memory of their unique experience within the crowd becomes a major deciding factor of their own and others’ participation in subsequent events</td>
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<td>-Participant resistance to perceptions of unjustified police confrontation results in “outcome violence”</td>
<td>-Oftentimes, the event becomes ritualised in the institutional memory of students</td>
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<td>-Police officers respond with escalated tactics and increased force</td>
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<td>-Crowd members disperse eventually, either by choice or by coercion</td>
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