

Students' Social Life at Dartmouth College: Reflections in Their Looking Glass

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Like almost every other university in the United States, Dartmouth College, where I have taught anthropology for the past 38 years, has been wrestling with the problem of binge drinking by students. Dartmouth's efforts (indeed those of most institutions) to understand why students' frequently engage in this potentially dangerous behavior and what to do about it have consumed enormous time, effort, and money. Policies and programs implemented at Dartmouth and on many other campuses to reduce heavy drinking have proven pathetically inefficacious. This outcome perplexes concerned administrators, who implement more programs, which devour still more resources. News headlines and reporting over the past decade suggest the larger public (especially parents) have become very worried about bingeing on campus. In a pile of recent news clippings on my desk, one sees laments such as these: "College presidents agree binge drinking is the most serious problem on campus" (Alcohol Policies Project, Center for Science in the Public Interest, fact sheet, March 2000); "College Binge Drinking Tops Parents' Fears" (CNN. Come/Education, 8/29/01); "Drinking Deaths Draw Attention to Old Campus Problem" (NYT 11/9/2004; "Five Binge Drinking Deaths' 'just the tip of the iceberg'" (USA Today, 10/7/2004)" — to highlight just a few. During this past year the major bulge of bingeing news comes from The Denver Post, (September, 2004) which could barely keep up, as it combed through appalling details of three students' deaths, each of which followed heavy drinking on Colorado campuses. Novels and memoirs dramatizing this topic are now sensational fare.

Soon after coming to Dartmouth, I learned about its regional fame as a work hard, carouse hard place, which in ten years would be recognized as an ideal virtual setting for the 1978 film, *Animal House*. This depiction has prevailed for many, who don't otherwise know Dartmouth, as the College's national image. To clear up at the outset some possible animal house-engendered misperceptions, Dartmouth is not in fact the drinking, partying school, which it is fabled to be. Over the past decade we have ranked near the median of 3300 institutions of higher education as regards reported per capita consumption of alcohol. Dartmouth annually conducts a "Risk Behavior Survey" which suggests that when Dartmouth Students party, they either don't drink, drink moderately, drink heavily, or binge at about the same rates as averages reported in the data collected by the Harvard School of Public Health in its recent nationwide surveys.

Students' alcohol fueled high jinks raised little concern for the faculty in the 60's and 70's, as the heavy carnival was and still is leavened with uplifting learning and many beneficial co-curricular activities. There was then and remains in place today an ever-growing staff of deans who deal with, and to some (decreasing) extent, shelter the faculty from students' bibulous exuberance. Despite all the deans, alcohol policies, and programs however, students' drinking at Dartmouth became steadily greater and more palpable, reaching an asymptote in the 1990's. We notice hangovers in addition to the normal somnolence in morning classes, and the very sparse enrollment of students in courses, which hold class on Thursday mornings, after what are called "Wednesday Night Meetings". (Read on for elucidation).

In response to the conspicuousness which the problem had attained in the 1990's, the Dartmouth faculty voted unanimously in 1999 to urge the administration to abolish the fraternity/sorority system, thought then to be an epicenter of heavy drinking. For various "political reasons" the Administration did not adopt the faculty's recommendation, but it did agree excessive, indecorous drinking and its attendant risks of harm were a real problem, about which something should be done.

The following spring, the Board of Trustees set up a select Student Life Committee to draft new policies, to be called the "student life initiative" (SLI). In January 2000, the Committee issued its report (Dartmouth College Board of Trustees, SLI Report Summary, January 10, 2000), which called for: (1) an enhanced system of residential clusters, (2) creation of new programs and spaces for general use, (3) major changes in the coed, fraternity, and sorority organizations, and (4) introduction of "new guidelines for alcohol and other drugs". The College implemented this program, Fall Term, 2000, at an annual cost -- net of previous student-life expenses -- of over eight figures.

By a coincidence in 2002, the Department of Anthropology asked me to take over our principal research course for majors, Methods of Ethnographic Field Research. The core of ethnographic method is observation, conversation, and informal interviewing of people in whose community one becomes an accepted participant. To learn this research method students must not only read or hear about it, but also undertake it themselves.

In light of lively and heated discussions on campus regarding drinking behavior and the recently implemented "Student Life Initiative", I landed on the idea of assigning my students research projects concerning undergraduate student social life. Each student was to choose one specific social setting or organization on campus to study. Each year since 2002, the students' research in this course has added pieces and shape to the mosaic. Now stacked high on my desk are the results of their efforts -- some 35 rich descriptions of many different kinds of activities carried out in numerous arenas: dorms, dining halls, fraternity basements, corridors, locker rooms, rehearsals, and off-campus pubs where students hang out, talk, bond, compete, party, and binge.

Students' research findings were initially of secondary importance to me, to them, and to the purposes of the course. But because I had thoroughly reviewed the research literature to discover how the social and behavioral sciences were weighing in on this vexing matter, I realized immediately that their ethnographies are very insightful, revealing, and highly relevant both to the current "scientific" research and to popular discussion about alcohol consumption and binge drinking on college campuses. I sketch here some important aspects of this scientific literature to set the stage for the students' work.

Henry Wechsler notes in his widely read and controversial book, *Dying to Drink*, 2002, that campus drinking has remained stable over recent years with no significant trends up or down, likewise for its harmful consequences, which include: death, injury, assault, sexual abuse, unsafe sex, academic problems, health problems/suicide attempts, drunk driving, vandalism, property damage, and police involvement. The National Institute On Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) in its "A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at US Colleges", April 2002, summarizes nationwide surveys which report that 44% of college students engage in

“binge” drinking (defined by Wechsler and others) as four or five or more drinks in a row over the past two weeks), and that since the 1980’s estimates of the number of heavy drinkers have remained stable between 40 – 45 percent of college students. Interestingly, Dartmouth students find utterly ludicrous the criterion for bingeing of “four or five drinks in a sitting”, insisting instead that one must consume at least ten drinks in a single sitting to be bingeing. According to surveys conducted at Dartmouth over the past decade, about one half the students here state they drink alcohol either regularly, heavily or both. About one seventh of them claim to be “abstainers”.

The NIAAA (2002, pp. 16 – 24) expresses a growing consensus, emphatically asserting the *need to change the culture of college student drinking* by targeting: (a) the college -- its surrounding community, and the student population as a whole, providing alcohol free options, restricting alcohol availability, making students aware of the “actual rates” of student drinking, and rigorously enforcing campus, local, state and federal laws restricting drinking; and (b) individuals’ “expectancies” (i.e. the good things they “erroneously” think will happen when they drink while providing brief motivational interventions -- pep-talks, counseling, warnings, stroking, training, to help them to control drinking in social occasions.

As the NIAAA states in the preamble of its 2002 report (pg. 1):

College drinking is a culture... beliefs and customs entrenched in every level of college students’ environments. Customs handed down through generations of college drinkers reinforce students’ expectation that alcohol is a necessary ingredient for social success. These beliefs and the expectations they engender exert a powerful influence over students’ behavior toward alcohol.... Students derive their expectations of alcohol from their environment and from each other, as they face the insecurity of establishing themselves in a new social milieu. Environmental and peer influences combine to create a culture of drinking.

The NIAAA diagnosis and prescription seem to make a lot of intuitive sense and their recommendations have been in large measure adopted by Dartmouth and hundreds of other schools. But there are in fact serious problems in both its understanding and its call to action, which my students’ research identifies and critiques. These problems are made explicit in the end, but I prefigure them here to help frame the students’ work. First, the NIAAA and others shift from an invocation of “culture” as culprit, to focus instead on the behavior of “heavy drinking”, defined and studied simply as “X ethanol consumed over Y time” and its statistical correlates. (NIAAA, 2002, pg. 6). Such an “operational definition” does not identify anything, which is “cultural” (i.e., experientially meaningful) in students’ drinking. The “culture” in question includes a host of other actions and ideas, with which the drinking is indissolubly bound up -- the forming of friendships, competing, blowing off steam, chilling, partying, clowning, raging, “hooking up”, fitting in and getting ahead amongst one’s peers. Second, missing from “scientific” studies of students’ alcohol consumption is students’ own discourse. Any study, which fails to place students’ voices at the center of inquiry, ignores culture. In their own work students speak copiously, candidly, and with ease, about the numerous settings and occasions of campus social life, which entail, but are not simply about, heavy drinking. As their reports and notes together originally totaled over 300,000 words, I have chosen a very few representative

selections to characterize their overall findings. My comments are in italics; students' words, which I have edited, are in plain text.

From High School to College: Freshman

For most students entering Dartmouth directly from high school, interests and activities including alcohol and drug use are well-established aspects of social life. The big new difference in college is that their activities are practically unsupervised. Finding and fitting into groups is a powerful motive for first-year students, who more than anything, fear being alone in this new, strange and daunting environment. For many first-year students the most numerous, obvious, and pleasurable channels to groups and "comfort zones" run with alcohol.

High school kids will drink, smoke, and do drugs no matter what adults say. The pressure to drink at high school seems to come from a natural teenage desire to break rules and a generally accepted stereotype that kids drink and do drugs behind their teachers' backs.

Connections between high school and college drug and alcohol use are suggested by the terms "over it" and "making up for lost time". Students with an "over it" attitude are "over" the novelty of getting drunk or high and feel more experienced than, or even superior to, their more naïve classmates. Those "making up for lost time" had little or no experience with drugs and alcohol in high school and use these substances in college to "make up" for what they've missed out on.

"I didn't start drinking until sophomore year [of high school]. The group of "top level" students all started drinking about the same time. Before that, me and my friends did "crazy" things like make "weird" videos...I didn't have any girlfriends in high school. I only kissed girls in the summer who weren't from my high school. I drank heavily at times in high school, and the summer before I came to Dartmouth I drank a lot at my job."

"My high school drinking was a combination of what I was allowed at home with my parents and what I did without them knowing, which was drink with my community theater friends. Alcohol was never kept from me, and I think this is why I'm better about it here.. I feel in control of my drinking. When I'm getting hammered, that's my purpose. I know where the "line" is. I feel this way about recreational drugs. I've seen a lot more people here than in high school who don't have control over themselves when it comes to drinking and drugs, and that's scary and funny to watch."

"I smoked pot in 8th grade at the local skateboard park. Someone had some shake left and gave it to me. I didn't get high or anything. The first time I got high was that winter, when me and my friend went up to a cave by the local ski mountain and smoked a lot. I ate a lot of food and then went home and stared at his math book, unable to do any work. I partied with my core group of friends heavily in junior year, tapering off a bit as a senior. The summer before coming to Dartmouth, I drank with my friends from work."

Drinking influences freshman year friendships. At the same time, freshmen seem to have the least control over the consumption of alcohol and are often unsure of campus social etiquette. They travel in groups to fraternities, trying to fit in. Since none are members of houses, and they usually do not know members yet, it is difficult for them to tell when they are welcome and how they should behave, especially since at Dartmouth, all doors are open.

“I had been to a party at a frat, so I decided to go back the next night. Me, my tripee, and one of my roommates started to go out. We ran into some friends and tripees who lived across campus and so we all went together. The brother at this house we know wasn't there, and there weren't that many people at the frat- so it was kind of awkward. None of us play much pong, and I don't know even if we had wanted to if we would have been able to. It was still kind of early so we went to the dice room and tried to play, but we really didn't know where to get the beer because other times it had just been kind of given to us like at parties. So we hung out in that room and talked, I don't know if anyone knew we were in there. Then we saw a girl getting beer who offered us some, so we got some. It took us awhile to understand the rules, but no one else there wanted to play there so we played for a long time and didn't drink much. We weren't really sure when you were even supposed to drink. We weren't really behaving in terms of the rules because there were no brothers to enforce them. It was more about talking and having fun. Then we decided to leave because people started to come in and call “next” and it felt strange not knowing anyone. Still I like basements more than I thought because that's where people socialize, and you can meet and talk to people, which you can't do on a crowded dance floor.”

Once at the room party, I watched a group of about 10 freshmen, all males except for two females, play drinking games. I explained my research to them and got some entertaining responses: one already intoxicated boy happily told me, beer in hand, "I drank in high school, I drink in college. End of story." One of the girls told me the same thing. "We didn't party that much in high school, just mostly on the weekends...I went through a party phase where I went out a lot. But I got out of it...[Here] we go out on Wednesdays." One enthusiastic volunteer told me, "I drank way too much in high school. Six nights a week. And I was valedictorian of my class. I'm getting A-'s here, and I'm drinking six nights a week." He seems eager to show me he is an experienced drinker who can easily handle drinking and academics. “

Sophomore and Junior Year

In the Dartmouth “D-Plan” sophomores and juniors choose to be in residence during any six of eight ten-week quarters, in this two-year period. This freedom of choice results in a high degree of variation in students’ residence on or absence from campus as they take advantage of the many study abroad programs. In the sophomore year, about one-half of students pledge a fraternity, sorority or mixed-sex affinity house.

Sophomore and junior year test friendships and relationships due to the absence of a large portion of the class on the Dartmouth Plan.

"You don't hear of many people starting to date junior winter. Junior spring all our friends are getting back and you might have totally different friends, and wonder if it is going to work. Lifestyle can change so much sophomore and junior year. You generally try not to start something with someone who will be off the next term."

In sophomore and junior years students are most involved in the Dartmouth social scene. Since students go on off-terms and abroad-terms these two years, there is a value in making the most out of your short time on campus. It is more conducive to relationships influenced by alcohol such as short-term hook-ups or partying with whom you might not normally go out. Social life climaxes during the required on-campus sophomore summer -- a time to be with your class and have fun, and it gives students the feeling of having their own turf at Dartmouth.

"We all lived with our houses sophomore summer and when we did, my old friendships went to shit. I was living with new people, and it was the first time I was part of a real clique, it's not the thing I'm most proud of, but sophomore summer is conducive to it. It was a self-indulgent summer. It was fun hanging out with the same group of girls, my grades were the worst, but it was my best term here...and it was never that carefree again. It was like you owned the place."

Sophomores Pledge a Fraternity

What makes you want (or not to want) to go through the rush process to join a fraternity? Even though this question was posed to many different men of many different backgrounds, the answers were all relatively similar.

"It was mainly, for a lot of us, convenience. Would I be hanging out with these guys every night if I didn't live with them? I would be dragging my sorry ass across campus."

"There were a bunch of people looking at different places and eventually people sort of just jumped on and said 'we all want to go together. So when one guy jumps in, it just makes it all that much more easy for the other guys to come in too.'"

Not only did they all just want to 'jump on' the fraternity bandwagon together. but they wanted to do it to avoid being alone.

"That's kinda' a fear that I had, that, you know, if you didn't rush with your friends, that well, you are still friends with them, but it just isn't gonna be the same. Even the talk of rush can leave one in the dark. If all my friends are rushing, it would be a good thing to do, so it would be a good idea cause it's going to take up a fair amount of their time."

What happens when a member of their group of friends is not in the rush picture or falls out of it? He must be brought back in order to maintain the group.

R: We did have a guy that we were pretty good friends with who ended up not rushing. Yeah, it was sort of a weird situation; like he just decided that he really didn't want to.

M: Do you have any idea what he might be thinking about that now?

R: Well, we're trying to get him to rush right now actually.

Insider status draws in other friends. Students say that after joining a fraternity or sorority, they experience changed friendships and relations with the opposite sex because they spend increasingly more time with their house.

"There was one guy actually who didn't get a bid the first night and had a call back, so the next night we, well once we had all got a bid we can talk to the brothers easier 'cause we're already pledges, we can tell the brothers our opinions like 'oh, we really like this guy' or whatever and we would really try to pull for him and get him a bid too."

"Well, like, we would get a conversation going with a brother we knew, and after things were going good we would be like "Oh, by the way (brother's name), this is my friend Patrick. We live together."

"After girls join sororities, the cliques begin. Houses are key to friendships. My freshman year here I had a lot of guy friends; they would come and hang out and we would pre-party. Then, by the end of the year I was pre-partying [drinking with a small number of people before going to the actual party] mainly with girls."

Sorority women share notes on the influence of alcohol and their relations with men, finding it difficult to move from hook-ups to the next level, friendship and dating.

"Guys here were probably tools [socially inept] in high school, and they don't know what they're doing unless they're drunk."

"They are more likely to ask for pong than a date. It could serve any function, and give mixed signals."

"Yeah past a certain hour, like 2 am, it's sketchy to go talk to guys in frats because they think you are asking to hook-up. I just wanted to talk to people, but I feel sketchy just going up to them, so I don't. People, even guys, are judgmental. Either a girl is cold and a prude frigid bitch or a slut."

Choice of women is an important feature of a fraternity. Sophomore men have factored in access to women and control of beer when deciding where to pledge. I heard this sentiment echoed on several different occasions, and it was generally agreed that one of the benefits of rushing is the access to attractive members of the opposite sex.

"As I get closer, I feel I should pick a frat, and it's kinda' arbitrary, you know, there are frats that suck. The only one I could see with benefit would be Frat Y and Frat Z. You know, they have hot girls and well-put together girls. All of the other places just have herbs [nerdy girls]."

Access to and control of beer in the Greek House basement proves to be of interest. On any given Wednesday, Friday, or Saturday night, there is a line at the bar of people waiting to be served a beer. The “line” system usually does not work on a first-come, first-serve basis. Instead, priorities are as follows: brothers, close male friends of brothers, close female friends of brothers, female acquaintances, male acquaintances, other females, other males. There is an accepted idea of “bros before hos” (i.e. male friends before women), but as soon as it shifts into not being a close male friend of a brother, women are favored. The idea is that it pays to be friends with brothers of a house if you are male or female, as you will get beers first, but it especially pays because if you are NOT friends with a brother, you will have to wait behind the women. This is not so much a matter of chivalry as it is of sex. The truth of the matter is that brothers are more interested in the sexual benefits of having female strangers around than any benefit of having male strangers around. Therefore, the girls get the first shot at a beer, and having the power of which girl gets beer when is something that is highly sought after.

This process happens over and over again until all the friends of brothers at the bar have been served. Then, a very interesting and amusing ritual takes place. While the men who are not friends of brothers wait patiently and quietly (it is VERY important not to be rude here), the women who are not friends of the brothers flirt and smile in hopes of getting a beer with a bat of the eyes. While many brothers fall for this ambitious flirtation, many others do not, and begin to literally play games with the girls. “I need a joke,” says the brother at the keg. “If you want a beer you gotta tell me a good one.” It is common at many fraternities for brothers to ask for jokes or trivia answers as a trade for a beer. In this way, brothers are doubly exercising their power (control of beer in general and control of who gets beer and when), and also providing entertainment for themselves and others at the same time. The gutsy girl who steps forward after a brother holds up a full cup and yells “who has a good joke?” gets a beer. It is an unspoken expectation, however, that the jokes be either very witty or very dirty. Often times a girl will tell a joke that does not meet the brother’s approval, and he will reject her and ask for another one. Again, this is an act of power, in that he has the ability to humiliate and deny the girl.

The Fraternity Social Scene

Fraternities at Dartmouth are divided space-wise: most have an entrance into a main hall, a basement with a bar and storage room for beer. These rooms are for “brothers only.” Upstairs floors consist of residential rooms and bathrooms. In most fraternities, the lower floors are used for parties (and thus tend to be the most unclean), and few people go upstairs other than to check e-mail in residential rooms or use the bathrooms. The basement of a fraternity is without a doubt the most sordid place in the fraternity: the floors are covered in a black liquid gunk that is a mix of beer, vomit, urine, water, and cleaning products, and males spill beer, and often vomit from consuming beer, in and around trash cans in the basement. The main hall of the main floor is usually kept somewhat cleaner than the basement: alcohol is supposed to be kept in the basement where it is less likely to be seen (and thus fraternities run less of a risk of getting into trouble with the College Administration) so there are usually fewer people drinking and socializing in the main halls of fraternities.

Members of fraternities are known as “brothers” and the issue of brotherhood is central in terms of having privileged access to certain rituals and certain spaces within a particular house. These spaces exist in every fraternity, are verbally marked as off-limits to non-members, and are typically referred to as “brothers only” spaces. As an example, I observed that in all fraternities, only brothers went behind the bar where beer was being served. I noticed that no one ever violated the rule. At a party at one fraternity, I observed this scene: The fraternity had a band playing on the main floor. No alcohol was allowed upstairs, so it all had to be kept downstairs in the basement. At one corner of the room was the bar. There seemed to be a few kegs behind the bar, but only one tap was running. Two brothers were handing out beers from this tapped keg to individuals in the crowd cramming into this corner of the basement. Some people were waiting in the corner for 10-15 minutes for a single beer. I noticed that the selection of who received a beer had very little to do with how long that person had been waiting; the brothers on the tap were giving beers to friends, or people they knew, and to attractive females. Brothers in the fraternity could walk around the side of the bar and fill beers for themselves or their friends, but anyone else had to wait in the crowded corner.

“Brothers, and some non-brothers, have a habit of “perching” up on the bar, a good place to observe what is going on in the basement around them. Often, a male is on top of the bar while a girl with whom he is talking/flirting is between his legs. Other times, a male will talk to the male directly next to him, also perched on the bar. Sometimes no words are exchanged, just observing the scene below. It gives them a much taller perspective, makes them look down on people below. From personal experience, I feel really powerful sitting up there, being able to see the entire scene.”

“Many brothers congregate behind the bar. It’s a place they can chill and not involve themselves with women. They mark their territory against the wall by urinating and vomiting, when they have to. Only brothers are allowed behind there. The control of the music and the alcohol is in the back room. The bar separates non-members from members.”

Members of fraternities thus have a visibly elevated status in their respective houses in the sense that they have unlimited access to alcohol and the spaces where alcohol is served. Fraternities, to some extent, are a safe-zone. They provide a space where almost anything is acceptable and even encouraged-- vomiting or urinating in public, heavy drinking etc). But they also serve as place of intense peer solidarity. When I was in the basement of a fraternity one night, I watched a brother come downstairs only to meet a barrage of criticism (jokingly) for not “hanging out enough.” One brother, playing pong, yelled, “Hey Don, nice of you to fucking hang out sometimes.” This comment was immediately followed by another brother who noticed the arrival of Don and said, “Are you still in this house?” As Don smiled and attempted to speak, another brother standing next to me cut him off with particularly sarcastic tone: “[The sport Don plays] has really been taking up your time, huh?” I observed that a number of brothers laughed at this comment, and they later explained to me that Don’s sport is not considered a very competitive sport at Dartmouth.” When a brother who usually hangs out, stops showing up at the fraternity, he is jokingly criticized. There is in brothers’ minds no acceptable excuse even if excuses are made.

“Felix has chosen not to drink at the meeting, so he can study and not be hung over. He told a story about the last midterm and how hung over he had been. Even though he told the brothers he did not want to drink too much, they ladled it in the usual, traditional way-- five beers in a giant ladle—and he was forced to drink quickly while playing games of “Ship” and “Tree.” He booted every two beers but still ended up extremely wasted and hung over for the midterm the next day, hence his decision to not drink any alcohol at all this evening.”

What is expected of being a brother in a fraternity is that one will want to “hang out,” drink, or play pong with other brothers. I observe seniors in one fraternity participating in a keg kill. In a side room of the basement, everyone is packed in with a keg, cups, and trashcans, and the door is closed. Beers are continuously poured and drunk by people in the room, and vomiting is a common sight. Fraternity toasts/songs are sung throughout, and brothers are “called out” to drink often. The door is only opened when the keg is finished, or “killed.”

As the keg kill begins, I notice that everyone has removed, or is in the process of removing, their shirts. They are standing in a circle around two trashcans, placed there so that people can vomit into them. As two brothers tap the keg and begin to pour beers from it, another brother who has brought a stereo into the room turns rap music on loudly, and the rest of the brothers in the room begin to cheer. As brothers begin drinking, they also note who is present and who has not shown up. “Where are all of the guys from 10 Conroy St.?!” As brothers begin to sing/toast one another and drink the beers, the door opens occasionally and more brothers come to join the keg kill. Each time a new person joins, a wave of cheers comes from the rest of the brothers. The new arrival immediately has the fraternity toast sung specifically to him, and he will drink a beer at the end of the toast.

Meetings

Meetings -- the word itself evokes images of business, significance, and discussion, but in the fraternities, meetings are a rowdy, celebratory, male-bonding time that sets the mood for the party that follows (at which time non-members are allowed into a fraternity) and ultimately, and perhaps most importantly, the arrival of females. Meetings are perhaps the most standardized ritual in fraternities. They occur weekly on Wednesday nights, involve specific songs/cheers/toasts, and only begin when enough members are present to provide a group dynamic. Meetings can be divided into three distinct parts: before meetings, meetings themselves, and the open event following meetings.

Most brothers who plan on attending meetings (attendance is never required) begin playing pong in the basement well before meetings, or sit/stand around the basement drinking, socializing, and watching games.. The driving force of this period of time before meetings is to consume alcohol and kick off a night of partying. As one senior in one fraternity said to me well before meetings, “I was expecting to get here a lot earlier, but I’ve been sleeping. So now I need to catch up on some serious beers” -- the implication being before meetings.

So what exactly is the significance of meetings? To a certain extent, meetings serve as a formal buffer between the casual “hanging out” that occurs with almost exclusively brothers before

meetings, and the expected party (with females) that occurs after meetings. Meetings also seem to legitimize Wednesday nights. They provide a time and place for males to be offensive, rowdy, and intoxicated, when they can bond without consideration of political correctness or the Student Code of Conduct and where the line between appropriate and inappropriate is blurred.

Ultimately, meetings are a kind of carnival. They are celebratory by nature, and they take that behavior which is normally unacceptable and give brothers a time to revel. Alcohol consumption is a constant, chanting and cheering is expected. Bodily functions are not considered taboo as brothers urinate and vomit in cans in front of all other brothers throughout meetings. Meetings in fraternities take place either in the basement or the main hall, and they usually begin with the President of the fraternity being cheered/toasted while he drinks beer until he vomits. After this event there are no events that can be considered standard procedure. Most fraternities have something that resembles what I have heard referred to as “notes.” While notes do not follow any particular format, they often involve jokes about what brothers have done, who brothers have dated or hooked up with. They can be in any format (a top ten list, a day-in-the-life-of etc), the only goal being that they provide amusement. Jokes about sex, homosexuality, masturbation, drinking, vomiting, and urinating are expected, and obscene comments are common. Combined with the fact that the ending of meetings marks the beginning of an open party in which females come to the house to drink and socialize, meetings also allow male members to shed some of the angst surrounding flirtation and sexuality, to take the edge off before these cross-sex interactions occur. It seems only logical then that themes like sex, masturbation, homosexuality would be at the center of most notes/jokes delivered at meetings.

Post-Meetings

The all-male meetings are preparation for the mixed-sex interaction to follow. After meetings end at the fraternities, there is the expectation that females will come over to the houses; and for the most part, this is normally what happens. At one fraternity one particular night, however, only two or three females came over in the roughly two hours after meetings had ended. I was sitting in the main hall of the fraternity with six or seven brothers, and one of the brothers yelled, “Yeah, all guys. Welcome to the sausage-fest.” [a term meaning when there are only males present; the joke being that only males with “sausages” are present; similar terms include “swordfight” and “pickle jar.”] His tone was slightly sarcastic, but I could tell that this thought was definitely on the minds of every brother in the main hall. It was strange to hear a shift in thinking: before and during meetings, fraternity brothers seemed to clearly express that they wanted only brothers (all males) to be present. After meetings, however, those same brothers wanted females to arrive immediately; if females did not come, then there was a tangible sense of disappointment in the house.

Pong

Pong, known as a “drinking game”, is popularly associated with fraternities and to a lesser extent sororities and dormitory rooms. Such games are played at almost all American colleges and universities. Dartmouth’s official view is that pong is mindless group activity, which stimulates excessive alcohol consumption. Therefore thinking people should stay away from it. But the proposition, “pong is merely a drinking game” is highly misleading. The report, which

follows, documents that heavy drinking games and occasions like pong, Beirut, ox-cart, dome, ship, or tree have many very important pay-offs for participants in addition to the drinking itself.

Four students stand around a plywood table, their eyes intently following the arch of a ball as it is volleyed back and forth. After a few hits, the ball plops into a cup of beer. Two of the students leap up and let out an elated squeal of victory, then cross to the other side of the table to shake the other two students' hands. "Rematch?" one of the students asks. "Sure, you're on." They retreat downstairs to fill up twenty-two more cups of beer.

Pong is the most popular drinking game at Dartmouth College. It requires a "table," often merely a large piece of plywood laid atop sawhorses or garbage cans. A board or broomstick is placed in the center to separate the two sides. Plastic cups are filled with beer and placed on either side of the table (there are a myriad number of existing formations, with different names, comprising two to more than sixteen cups of beer). The ball is hit with ping-pong paddles whose handles have been broken off. The basic object of a game of pong is to sink or hit as many of the opposing team's cups as possible, making them drink the beer inside, until all their cups are gone.

While watching pong games and listening to my subjects' interviews, three themes concerning pong's social function at Dartmouth emerged. I found that pong:

- a) serves as an important outlet for competition, allowing students to prove their abilities and also gain recognition amongst their peers;
- b) allows students to "hang out" and spend what they perceive to be quality time with friends. In addition, pong games permit students to meet new people and develop a "network of acquaintances;"
- c) facilitates interaction between members of the opposite sex and helps students connect with prospective sexual partners.

These three major functions of pong are not mutually exclusive, and I found that one game can even accomplish all three simultaneously. Additionally, even if the primary function of a game of pong is one or more of these observed themes and not simply achieving inebriation, this does not indicate that the participants of the game are not drinking, or attempting to become drunk by playing.

Competition was one of the reasons cited most frequently by students for why they enjoyed playing pong. Dartmouth is an inherently competitive place. Dartmouth students tend to be extremely self-motivated, "type A" people who thrive on competition against others, and against themselves. Pong is played as a break from work, but most students play pong for its competitive intensity, not as a method of relaxation.

"People play pong as a break, as a release. And people here are all intense. We had to be to get here. Our schedules are intense; terms are only 10 weeks long. Everyone is really intense about studying. So we have intense breaks to compensate, hence everyone's being so hardcore about pong here."

“Dartmouth attracts competitive people. Girls here compete over guys. They compete over skinniness. Everything. People who play more pong are more competitive people.”

Many students joke that “pong is a win/win game,” meaning that even if you lose, you become drunk. However, nearly all the subjects I interviewed stressed that winning a game of pong was far preferable to losing, and that the point of playing was indeed victory. This was also evident in the importance that subjects placed upon playing with a “good partner.” A boy stressed to me that even if he were “interested in hooking up with a girl,” he would not play with her if she could not play pong relatively well. In addition, I observed a game between four friends in which one girl adamantly refused to play with another (her admitted best friend) because “she sucks.” There is definitely a stigma attached to being an upper classmen and not being a good pong player.

About twenty-five percent of the Dartmouth student-body are intercollegiate athletes and approximately three quarters of Dartmouth participates in athletics of some kind. The athleticism characteristic of Dartmouth students also contributes to a desire for competition in pong. Several subjects I interviewed were of the opinion that athletes were also inherently better at pong, and also played more.

“We’re all athletes in my house. We need the competition. I don’t like just sitting down and drinking. (Varsity Football player) I love competition, so for me pong is perfect because it’s for competitive people who like to drink.”

Playing pong provides students with a social atmosphere in which they can “hang out” with their old friends and meet new friends.

“Good friends will often “schedule a pong date” with each other to catch up on each other’s lives. It’s always planned when I play. Like, my friends and I will be like, oh, let’s play pong tonight. And we decide on a place and time. So I almost always play with my girl friends. Or sometimes it’ll be like a pong double date. People play cause it’s just something to do with friends. Like, instead of going out for coffee, or seeing a movie or something, you play pong. Pong facilitates “hanging out” because of the long pauses that occur when a ball gets hit off the table and needs to be retrieved, and when the opposing team drinks.”

I overheard talk about everything from classes to rather explicit tidbits about people’s sex lives. When a team had to drink, they often took an extremely long time to do so, extending the time during which they could chat. The chatting also continues throughout the game, and I witnessed games during which the participants carried out extremely animated and involved conversations and still seemed to have no problem focusing on the actual game.

There appears to be a noticeable difference between the “hanging out” accomplished by girls over pong and the “hanging out” accomplished by boys. Girls spent pong games chatting about school, their “boy situation,” or other important aspects of their life when they played together with friends. When a group of four male friends played together, the tone was often that of a “boy’s club.” The discussions did not usually end up delving deep into anyone’s personal life

and instead often became sort of insult contests or “gross-out” bonanzas. When I asked one male interviewee to tell me about games he played with his friends, most of who are in the same fraternity, he provided me with the following stories. Apparently “hanging out” amongst boys sometimes takes on a literal meaning:

In the summer we play boxer pong. We just take off our pants and play in boxers. There was also this tradition from an alum who was President here some years ago. He was playing against the VP, and the president just took out his balls and was playing with his balls just hanging out. The VP was too distracted by the balls to play. Hahahahaha. Yeah, we’re trying to start that up again. We made J do it this summer. Oh man it was nasty, he wasn’t even playing pong, he was just standing there with his balls all out and shit. Fuck me if I could concentrate!

Pong games create a social space in which students can seek out and connect with “hook-ups” or sexual partners. Just as playing with someone new can begin a friendship, playing with someone new who happens also to be an attractive member of the opposite sex can begin a romantic relationship, or at least a casual sexual liaison, in a kind of fore fore-play. College age students are still in the process of becoming comfortable with sex and understanding how to successfully relate to the opposite sex. For this reason, interaction between young men and women is often tinged with anxiety. Pong provides a structure in which interaction with a member of the opposite sex becomes somewhat more comfortable. In addition, pong entails the consumption of alcohol, which, among other things, decreases inhibitions while increasing confidence. It is for these reasons that pong often serves as a relatively stress-free “first date.”

“Pong is a more laid back way to interact with the opposite sex. I don’t think pong is a date, but it’s easier and more casual and could be a way of expressing interest in someone without commitment since you could then say well it was just pong. But I haven’t really played pong with a guy because I haven’t been asked and I am not in a Greek house. I guess I would wait more to be asked, but maybe if I were interested in someone or a friend, I could ask them casually to help me work on my pong skills, it could be a way to initiate something in a casual and fun and maybe show interest. It’s spending time without commitment.”

"I felt like playing pong ... really served to lighten the mood and break the ice... since we definitely didn't know these guys. I decided to play pong with the intention of meeting some cool guys and possibly "hooking up." Things like that seem to be so much easier when drinking...and it's almost what's expected with the whole pong-Dartmouth-hookup culture."

“If you see guys in our basement playing pong with girls, they’re probably girls guys want to hook up with. But, ya know, it goes both ways. The girls know how the game works, they’re playing pong with the boy for the same reason the boy is playing pong with them.“

“Yeah the first time I hooked up with D was after we played pong. I wouldn’t say our relationship started with pong, but pong is in the initial parts of relationships. It helps you get used to the person.”

"I was told no coed game of pong is nonsexual unless it's with friends established as friends. I've never had one real date, but I've had a lot of pong dates.

Sustaining serious social relationships is difficult for many seniors because of the demand that one get serious about building a resume to launch a career or further study after graduation. Also they tire of the peripatetic residential life with its transitory connecting and disconnecting of people and the heavy time requirements and evanescent outcomes of the party and hook-up scene.

Many seniors seem to change their views regarding the role alcohol and pong play in their friendships and relationships, by looking back on their previous years and evaluating their past choices. Those seniors who don't go out as much as they used to express frustration with the hook-up scenes and see them as mainly something they might have done in the past and now look down on. Some remain confused about how to meet people at a school where you run the risk (a) of being rejected (for a date or hook-up) and then seeing every day the person who spurned you; and (b) where many people have stated that in fact there is no dating. Senior women in particular complain that senior males tend to want to date underclassmen, while the senior girls are usually not interested in dating younger men.

However, drunk I might have gotten, I don't think I was being very true to myself. I've never been very forward and brazen like that, alcohol or not. He went home and I went upstairs to bed! I'm glad it didn't work out! People just seem to go out with the express purpose of getting ass. Sometimes they care who it is, sometimes they don't. My friends were prepping me for going out with that purpose last night- they told me that you have to be in the attitude that the guy means nothing to you, you're using him and it doesn't matter because he's using you as well. It just doesn't make sense to me, I guess, and sometimes I feel like I'm one of the only ones who feels the way I do. I think it's definitely hard to find someone who is genuinely interested in you as a person and to have that develop into a friendship and then something more. I've only really started to date someone I met in a basement and hooked up with that night, once. I honestly think that if you're looking for a serious relationship you have to get away from the basements and the pong, and meet people outside. I think that for girls it gets harder...out with the old, in with the new. I've heard boys refer to senior girls many times as "old cows." I don't know what facilitates meeting people. I think it depends on the mindset of the person.”

"In previous years I was a lot ragier. I'd go out all the time, having roommates made me drink more. I'd go out when I didn't expect to, but now, I feel like I have responsibilities, like interviews and applications in addition to class. It's been hard this term. It's sad, but my friendships have suffered, and I have been somewhat alienated as a result because I was the girl who always went out. I said to my friends that they need to understand that I

can't go out all the time now, and they are receptive in theory. But it's different. When a piece of the relationship involved going out, and now I have work, I have to more actively seek out having fun with friends - for even little things like going to eat. I am more in search because I don't go out every night with them all the time. I've found that when I've been fighting with my friends and I have tried to resolve it while sober this term, it has not been effective. They are more receptive if I go out with them and talk while drunk. Going out and drinking with friends solidifies relationships. I had a fight with a friend and sent her a long probing blitz, and got no response, however we were out drinking together and she was like my best friend. She later sent me a blitz [e-mail] about something, and everything seemed fine. It's the way to normalize things. It's kind of sad.

The Dorms

While Greek Houses are centers for social activity at Dartmouth, student researchers found commensality with heavy consumption of alcohol or drugs in many other places and contexts on campus. We look briefly into the dorms, sports, teams and performing arts. At first glance, the pot ritual, cooperative and slow, contrasts with the faster-paced pong scene, yet both serve similar purposes for socializing and bonding. Dormitories, including those labeled "substance-free," are the principal venues for smoking.

Freshmen cannot join Greek houses, so I knew Amos and his friends didn't have any meetings to go to. I arranged to meet him around 10 at his dorm, because he told me people on his floor would be "pre-gaming", which means drinking in their rooms before going out to Greek houses to socialize. We ended up going from Amos's dorm to another dorm where a friend of a friend of Amos' was throwing a room party. I ask them to tell me about room parties on the walk over:

They tell me about the difficulties of hosting parties in double rooms. They're too small, and everyone tries to cram into one place. Sometimes they spread out amongst the rooms on the hall. I ask if S&S [Safety and Security] has ever caught them, and they shrug. "Not really," they tell me, describing this one time when an '04 with a bar in his room had hosted a party with all '07s. "S&S called and said 'Clear it out in 5 minutes or we're coming up,' so that was pretty sweet they got the warning."

From what Amos and his friends tell me, these freshmen do not see S&S as a serious threat and do not let the prospect of getting caught drinking in the dorm bother them or affect their social plans.

There were about 10 of us all sitting on the floor, the bed and the futon in what approximated a circle. There were several small conversations going on at a time. On the floor in the corner were several bottles of alcohol (Pucker, Vodka, Tequila, Vanilla liqueur) and mixers (Sprite, Coke, orange juice, lime juice), along with an assortment of plastic, paper and solid plastic cups. Most everyone had a cup with some mixture or another, and those who ran out would pass their cup to the person sitting closest to the alcohol and request a drink mixture. Occasionally people would get up from their spot and mix their own drink if they wanted a more specific combination, but mostly people pass their cups along if they wanted a refill. There was also

several bags of chips and cookies with various things (frosting, hummus and peanut butter) to dip them in which were passed around.

Adam: I think that we need to try out the pumpkin! [Referring to a large pumpkin which he crafted into a four way bong.]

Knock on the door. A few people call out “who is it?”, while Adam puts the pumpkin and other paraphernalia behind the futon. “It’s S&S,” someone on the other side of the door calls out, intentionally trying to make his voice sound deeper. People laugh. Doors always stay locked especially when people are smoking pot. Although it is not a huge concern, most people are aware of the possibility that S&S might burst in before they have time to put things out of sight. The general assumption has always been that if things are not visible then you will not be bothered. Because none of us live in the room, people seem to feel less responsibility toward the other hall residents who might be bothered by the noise. Plus people were all fairly intoxicated and noise and controlling voices was not something that people seemed aware enough to be able to control. “Its probably Jay and Rob” someone says, while another person gets up to unlock the door. Jay and Rob, who are [a gay couple] dating, enter together and immediately appear relatively drunk. People greet them and continue on with various conversations. Jay and Rob begin to tell a humorous story about their journey across the green from another party

Anna: (after five or so minutes) Shushing everyone “Guys this is totally out of control!” We shouldn’t be this loud!”

The noise level is lowered slightly, although it doesn’t decrease all that significantly. Meanwhile I listen to a conversation between Adam and Jen, about her roommate Catherine, who has passed out on the bed.

Jen: “I don’t know how I’m going to get her home, do you want a strange girl in your bed for the night?”

Bill: hmmm... hard choice (Laughs)

Jen: I know, does S&S carry? Seriously, can we call them and be like, hey we just need you to carrying my passed out friend to the dorm.

Bill: (laughing) yeah that would not be a problem at all. They love to transport unconscious people back to their dorm rooms all the time.

A few people have fallen asleep, some people are playing a card game with graphic porn cards; most people are talking and laughing. There is some drinking that is going on, but mostly people have stopped drinking and are fairly inebriated. During the party a number of people have smoked on several occasions, and the pumpkin bong, as crafted by Adam, has been put away. Jay, who is extremely drunk, has been sitting with Rob and the two have been very affectionate: kissing and touching. Jay has also kissed and touched a number of girls in the room. He is generally pretty affectionate, although this certainly can be attributed to his drunken state. Eventually the party gets broken up by S&S for a noise complaint.

Smoking Weed: Ritual and It’s Meaning

Weed smoking is a circular set-up. This makes passing a joint (or bowl, or bong) much easier. The first smoker determines the direction of passing, and once set, there is little confusion. In every instance where the owner of the weed either rolls the joint, or packs the bowl, the owner smokes first, then passes. Things get a little trickier when someone besides the owner of the weed rolls the joint. In one situation I observed, two different people, Sue and Jim, each contributed half of the weed for a joint. Jim rolled the joint, and smoked first, without offering the first hit to Sue. In another situation, Al, who owned no weed, rolled a joint from Sally's weed. In this case, Al smoked first, without offering the first hit to Sally. I've also noticed times when the owner of the weed has relinquished the advantage of the first hit to a special guest.

Once the first puff of weed has been smoked, it is usually passed to the left. After smoking the first rip from a bong, Lea, sitting between Jay and Trudy, chose to pass to Trudy on her right. There are two possible reasons I can think of for this deviation: Trudy had supplied the weed for a joint, and Lea is significantly closer emotionally with Trudy. Another instance of passing to the right occurred as I was observing the unfamiliar group. The owner of the weed was situated between me and another girl. He passed to the other girl. This could be for a number of reasons: he did not know me, he did not know if I would smoke, he is friends with the girl, he had romantic interest in her, or he does not follow the convention of passing to the left. However he made his decision, this was one of only three instances of passing to the right that I observed.

When, at last, the pot comes their way, smokers will take either one or two puffs at a time, but never more. This keeps the weed moving, ensuring a fair share for everyone who wishes to partake. If people choose to puff twice, they tend to do so toward the beginning of a smoking cycle, perhaps because the weed supply is most plentiful then. This 'one or two puffs' is consistent in all groups I observed on campus.

At some point, every bowl must come to an end -- all of the weed turned to ash. What do they do with the bong? If you are the one who has been packing the bong with your weed, the ball is clearly in your court. You can decide whether you want to repack the bowl, or call it quits for the session. On one occasion when Sara was supplying the pot, the bong kicked on her turn. She told me that she judged the smokers in the room to be sufficiently stoned by, "the giggles and chattiness," that she chose not to repack the bowl. Dealing with a kicked bowl is a little more complicated when you are not the one who owns the weed. Some simply put the bong in a central location, such as a table in the middle of the room, so that the owner of the weed can see that the bowl is done, and choose whether or not to repack it.

Seating arrangements, passing orders and guidelines for dealing with a kicked bowl are all obvious examples of ritualized behavior surrounding pot smoking. When I began my research, taking notes of physical actions involved with the act of smoking pot, I soon realized that I was missing a huge piece of the ritual: the social interactions.

I stayed around after the smoking had stopped. I hung out, and chatted with everyone, and it hit me: the ritual of smoking pot is not just about the act of smoking. The ritual of smoking pot extends far past the time the bowl is kicked, or the joint put out. The ritual of pot smoking involves a complex mix of conventionalized physical actions as well as emotional bonding.

S: How is it that you guys became such a tight group of friends?"

R: We all smoke pot. To be perfectly honest about it, we requested a smoking dorm.

S: So, you're saying, people requesting to be in a non-smoke free environment, they kind of self-select into a type of culture?

R: Yeah. It's a good conversation maker. I mean, I'll have conversations with people randomly just over a cigarette or a bowl with people I don't know.

S: What do you do when you guys hang out?

R: We generally eat dinner together. Mainly males, and then if you wanted females to come, you'd go knock on their door and just ask the person, "Hey, do you want to go eat?"

S: What else do you do when you "hang out"?

R: We generally take a study break every night at midnight--no matter whether we are done with our work or not. Actually it's a really good incentive to be done with our work at midnight for the study break, to really push through all of our reading, have it done for the study break, and just chill out till two o'clock in the morning or whatnot. Um, it's really hard to go to sleep before two o'clock in the morning.

Marijuana helps students to form friendships

"I think you guys were nervous to take me as a friend but once I started smoking weed, you were all like, 'Oh, now we have something in common,' and I think that's why we started spending so much social time together."

"The thing about all of you guys is that I probably wouldn't have been friends with you if I hadn't started smoking, but that's not the thing that keeps us friends"

"If I see someone smoking, I generally think that I'll probably get along with them ... It's a good way to meet people. It's a common interest, and makes it easier to invite someone to "hang out"

"With weed being illegal and discriminated against, it's a good way to get to know people and automatically have a level of trust and intimacy."

Sports-Teams

Each team, regardless of varsity or club status, has its own identity on campus that the members of the team create and perpetuate. The reputation and personality of a team is known on campus, and the members are expected to maintain the image that people know them by. When freshmen come on campus, they do not just enter as members of a team but become also part of a network of alumni, stories of past successes and failures, and traditions. At the same time they embrace their team identity by making it a large part of their life. The social aspect of the team is what members wrap up in. One athlete explained that she took a few weeks off in the fall because

the training was getting intense, but she came back because she loved her team members and the sport. When she stopped being on the team for those couple of weeks, she missed it, emotionally, socially, and physically.

Another athlete defines himself primarily as a member of his team. He tells me that all the members of his team will have the same smelling hair because the freshmen are required to buy shampoo and soap for the locker room. He mentions that the upperclassmen on the team will "probably start hazing us soon." Although he "would not constitute any of the stuff as hazing," he is not nervous about what the upperclassmen will make them do because he is excited to take part in the activity. He says as a team they joke about it, and that any of the activities are optional. These activities not only solidify the person's sense of belonging and membership on the team, but also some of their silly antics are seen by other students and help to define the team as a whole, attracting outsiders to find friendships among its members.

The Team and the Greek System

Athletic teams provide an introduction to and are intertwined with the Greek system. Since teams are a mixture of freshmen and upperclassmen, freshmen athletes befriend older, affiliated team members and visit their Greek houses. Younger members gain their knowledge of the Greek system primarily from their upper class teammates, and Greek houses are often stereotyped with particular athletic teams. Thus, athletic teams are key to entering the Greek system and provide a special comfort and ease with which the non-affiliated athlete can hang out in these spaces.

Varsity athletes in training are often among the first freshmen to arrive on campus. Here one athlete describes attending a Greek house event before the fall term officially opened.

"I remember being wasted and hooking up in the basement, then sleeping on a couch in the meetings room for the night."

Sometimes team-bonds protect freshmen athletes from the initial disrespect that most freshmen face in Greek houses and reinforce their love and dedication to the team.

"My team helped me to find the Greek system. I had it much easier than non-athlete freshmen. One brother tried to kick me and another freshman off their table right before our pong game was over. A member who was my teammate stood up for me and intercepted the brother. My teammate threw punches to defend us."

Apart from exposure and ensuing familiarity with the Greek system, the team also helps freshmen to learn about Greek life and compare houses. Athletes ask the upperclassmen on their team about details of rush and pledging.

"My only impressions of rush and the personalities of the sororities come from what I have heard upperclassmen girls on the team describe."

As in the Greek houses, sports-team partying and drinking play a prominent role. While some athletes value it, others are ambivalent or come to resent it.

“Since events are so spread out and we do not travel as a team, it is important that we party together. I would not know the team as well if it were not for the parties. The party is as important as practice for team bonding.”

“Parties made me realize that I could do it (be on the team) because I liked the people so much. It would be awkward if the team didn't party because it makes us closer. Parties help us deal with the time commitment and the fact that we are gone all the time.”

"The culture of drinking is meshed into the culture of the team. Why is it that the guys drink before we compete, and how weird is it that this behavior is thought of as "okay" on our team. Members feed off of one another and the upperclassmen

“Certain people on the team did not drink, but just when others did not too. When there is not a support group of nondrinkers at a party, these people get trashed. Being on a team surrounded by people who drink "worsened" the sobriety level of teammates.”

“Alcohol is the rallying point for all of the team's social functions. It's too important for some people on the team, and many of them are raging alcoholics but don't realize it. Alcohol does not need to play such a large role. We could split our time between alcoholic and non-alcoholic events. It's sad that so many people on the team black out and piss their beds. The team encourages raging alcoholics.”

Drinking on athletic teams is most visible during “drink ups” and “meetings, which provide unity, both among the individual teams, and between teams. Drink ups are considered “less fun” than the popular meetings.

“Drink ups are what follows a game, and are like meetings in that it is social and the same general format for meetings, except this time, the team we just competed against is joining us. The atmosphere is always friendly, and “no shower before drink ups” is the rule. The no shower rule provides for equity between the home and away team's appearance since the home team can easily get showered and the away team cannot.”

Meetings are held on Thursday nights, and the social chair determines the theme and guides the dress for the night-- silly, non-serious attire is encouraged. Meetings are about team bonding.

“You get to dress up before hand and then that's the time to integrate with your team and love your team. Meetings, like drink-ups, are about imbibing lots of alcohol, but in a safe setting with people one trusts completely.”

"Its fun to drink and sing about sex--like at meetings. Its team bonding."

Singing songs about alcohol and sex while drinking are an important part of “meeting” tradition.

While the songs originated from the men's teams, women have introduced them to their sports as well.

"For the men the songs may just be the ol' boys' reflections and attempts to be overly masculine. We women reclaimed the songs to say 'look we took the sport and the songs.'

Recently some athletes have suggested that athletic team "drink ups" and "meetings" should be joint social events with teams of the opposite sex participating together.

"I think joint meetings would be fun just to try it out. I hear the men's songs are derogatory towards women, but how can we say something when ours are just as bad? They probably believe in their songs as much as we do in our."

But many male and female athletes protest, wishing to protect their own gender solidarity.

"As far as joint meetings go, that'll just never happen. We don't like having forced social events. It has nothing to do specifically with the women's team, it's just our time and it would be strange. Guys also don't want to watch a bunch of girls drink 'til they boot, we have no interest in that. It's our time alone to do our thing; why would we want women there to ruin it? Its like frat meetings, I never understood the idea of joint meetings with a sorority, its just dumb. Don't get me wrong, we like girls, but that's our time. You can come over after we're done! As far as songs go, they get offensive and would be inappropriate to sing in front of women. Some of these songs I would definitely not want my little sister to hear."

" It wouldn't work. The whole misfit factor and the lesbian factor would be a disaster. They're all songs about fucking and doing stupid shit. Maybe I'm prude. They're just gross. I mean, I don't enjoy singing about scrotums. Frat songs are aggressive, raunchy, and a lot of the songs are about lesbians."

The Performing Arts

"The Clefs" is recognized as an accomplished and professional singing group. Its musical leaders double as a social leaders, taking care of both performance details and social events which foster group bonding.

While not all of these social activities include the use of alcohol, the majority do. Alcohol consumption is an important component of the social life of The Clefs, and even in situations which do not involve alcohol such as rehearsals, performances and IM [intra-mural] sports games alcohol is remembered or planned: "how crazy members of the group were last night" or "how crazy we will be at our next social gathering!"

Such comments at non-alcoholic events have led The Clefs to gain a reputation for frequent and often excessive alcohol consumption as well as general debauchery. Vocal about the amount of alcohol they consume, members of the group do much to support this reputation. Members

remember high schools where musical performance was neither respected nor considered a "cool," and they were happy to find in their freshman year, that the group "knew how to have a good time" but was still able to perform at a very high level. Even though Dartmouth is a place where the performing arts are respected by both students and faculty, many members of the group feel they are compensating for the lack of respect they experienced being musicians in high school by promoting the reputation of The Clefs as debaucherous (*sic*).

Seniors, who have been in the group for four years and found strong friendships among its members, promote the idea of "widespread debauchery" and "unbridled hedonism," attributing the formation of their friendships to out-of-rehearsal socializing and drinking. They encourage underclassmen to take part in the drinking social events not only at rehearsals or in passing on campus, but in blitzes [e-mails] that are sent to the entire group. These blitzes often describe past times and excesses when members of the group were intoxicated and sent to Dick's House or were guilty of vomiting at a party.

The jovial manner with which these blitzes are sent and received serves to put new members at ease and conveys to them that although the group will not forget what you do when you are intoxicated and will probably poke fun at you for the rest of your time at Dartmouth, your actions (with the exception of sexual misconduct) will never be held against you. Seniors speak fondly of a party from their freshman year with punch so strong that three of the freshmen spent the night in Dick's House, and constant references are made to a person who vomited on the table at a wedding and yet another who vomited twenty-seven times into a Wendy's bag in a garbage pail while the group was on tour.

"Blitz conversations serve to bind the group together by creating a strong oral history. They send a strong message to new members, our "pledges," that alcohol is part of the social nature of the group and if you wish to participate in social functions, you must deal with the presence of alcohol-- although no one is ever forced to consume it. The use of the term "pledge" to refer to new members of the group is meant as a joke. It sets up a social hierarchy where returning members, even if they are younger in age, have a higher status than new members. This term also explains how the group views itself as a finite social organization. We initiate new members with the same terminology and in somewhat of a similar fashion as Greek houses on campus do."

A member of The Clefs describes a recent performance.

"When we arrive, we encounter other intoxicated members of the group attempting to make their way up to Dartmouth Hall on dew-soaked grass as we trip and laugh. When we reach the risers on which we will stand for singing and arrange ourselves by class so that the freshmen are in the front, our conductor tries to get our attention and encourages us to focus on the music we will be singing. When the time comes to sing, we do so boisterously. Even in our intoxicated state, the returning members are able to remember most of the words and hold their own parts in each song. The latter is no easy task as all songs have at least four parts and sometimes as many as eight. During the breaks between songs, we are entirely incapable of focusing on the speeches being delivered by the President of the College and distinguished students and raucously applaud and yell at

each break in the speech. When we begin to sing again, we become somewhat more focused. The focus is difficult to maintain since people are holding one another up to prevent the most intoxicated from falling off of the risers.”

Discussion of the Students’ Ethnographies

To ask what "motivates" or "causes" college students to engage in ritual heavy drinking is to ask an extremely complicated question *not* about a specific, expert-defined bit of behavior but about campus culture and that of our nation as a whole. The NIAAA and others are misled in their belief that campus drinking comprises a “culture”. *There is no culture of drinking*, any more than there is a culture of hanging out, competing, blowing off steam, or getting laid. The word “culture” in that NIAAA phrase is simply an epithet, which signifies the authors’ opinion that the identified behavior is a big problem. It is a problem, but however big, it’s not in itself a culture. Indeed it is because of our own “culture” – that in the United States – that we focus on, and construe students’ ritual heavy drinking and its modest risks to be so portentous. The risks (probabilities of harm) of bingeing are dwarfed after all by the risks of driving, of environmental pollution, of poverty, insane wars, to name a few of the thousands of really big risks. But I digress.

The emphasis on social form or ritual in student drinking or smoking suggests just how much “substance-use” on campus is about belonging to and enacting of scripted roles in social groups. These activities entail high value payoffs for students: blowing off steam, hanging out, meeting and mating with the opposite (or same) sex, demonstrating athletic prowess, affirming or creating social bonds, overcoming reserve and shyness, fitting in and getting ahead amongst peers, overcoming gender stereotypes, flouting societal norms, raging, and having one hell of a lot of fun. Under these circumstances, to ask or to compel students, who participate in drinking commensality, not to drink or to drink “moderately” is to ask or compel them to forego many or most of the opportunities on campus to enjoy the payoffs just enumerated. For this reason alone, most students ignore administration entreaties to drink moderately and subvert efforts to control or thwart ritual drinking occasions. They keep their drinking occasions from public view and parry efforts to regulate the organizations and settings in which these rituals take place. The schemes and subterfuges deployed to avoid scrutiny and to maintain that independence provide fun, diversion, and challenge. Students do not think or talk about policy, safety & security office, deans’ offices, or student life initiatives. Social life operates largely independently of these "adult" run programs.

Students’ discussions of drinking in dorms, sports groups, performance groups, affinity groups, pledge groups demonstrate that the issue of ritual heavy drinking is not simply one of fraternities and sororities, though these may be epicenters. Dormitories for example, including ones, which are “substance-free”, have room and hall parties (“pre-gaming”) on a regular basis, which are not dissimilar in function from those held in the Greek houses. Ritual drinking occasions often entail flouting of normal societal etiquette by routinely combining drinking, whether heavy or not, with highly scripted acts of nudity, profanity, clowning, despoiling the environment, as well as blackouts, speech slurring, public vomiting & urination. Alcohol is a sacrament in the black (carnival) mass. Take away the liquor and out goes the carnival.

Dartmouth students are clearly aware that Dartmouth heavy drinking norms with accompanying ritual “profanation” of conventions are limited to one’s undergraduate life. Certainly, longitudinal data collected in other places does seem to reflect the view that frequency and amount of alcohol use, and the public flouting of decorum, returns after college to baseline societal averages. This fact alone indicates that “addiction” plays a very small causal role in explaining heavy drinking among college students. How many people become alcoholics solely because of genetic vulnerability and campus life alone is impossible to say. But the number can’t be huge.

For most students, especially in the first two years, there is an apprehension about aloneness, which is ameliorated by the plans and structures of ritual drinking. These events and occasions call forth, embolden, and turn into action a quest for interpersonal connection and intimacy by young people, whose “cognitive scripts” social skills, and emotional confidence in this undertaking may be meager. By the senior year many students, especially women, focus more on “getting their act together”, so they may be better prepared to enter the “real world” after college. This development or growth seems to reflect for many a conscious decision to be less heavily involved with the rage, hook-up, and heavy drinking scene, and to be more committed to stable, enduring friendships and with one’s studies.

Ritual heavy drinking at Dartmouth, and I dare say on most campuses, is part and parcel of an essential core of cultural value and practice -- being enveloped, embedded, participating in, and belonging to groups. To understand how to mitigate the “problem” of individuals’ “unhealthy” drinking, one must first recognize that that behavior is but a small piece of a much larger arena of social action, in a specific ecological, organizational and ideological context. One cannot pull such an arbitrarily defined bit of behavior from a complex field of activity and seek to change that behavior alone, as if it could be isolated from its meaningful and functional connections to a host of other mental, material and behavioral patterns. To change students’ “drinking behavior” *is* to change culture. In the end this means either (1) employing overwhelming force to banish alcohol entirely from campus environments, or (2) providing facilities, spaces, programming, and an ideology of student “ownership” of their activities, in which most or all of the positive, diverse, and rewarding *social* functions and payoffs of ritual heavy drinking occasions are fully served and replaced by other forms of social action.

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