

FIRST YEAR: Meeting and making friends

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The most significant event in a student's first year at college will be finding a small group of students to befriend, bond with, spend time with, and identify with. Joining a social group, irregardless of what that group is, is the first gateway students pass through in their college experience—those few students who do not find others to share their first year of college with constitute the majority of students who leave the institution. Thankfully, for an individual student, hundreds of others are in the same boat they are, and meeting new people, while it may be stressful and difficult, especially in those first few days and weeks, occurs at a relatively rapid pace—students will meet dozens, maybe even hundreds of students within a short period of time, and out of them have numerous opportunities to hang out, talk, and spend time together.

There are numerous environmental and organizational factors directly encouraging this process of network-building.

First, the various pre-orientation, orientation, and first few week's activities available to and sometimes mandatory for first-year students are typically structured so as to maximize both the quality and quantity of students' interactions with one another. Activities that bring together students living in a dorm, or students who intend to major in a certain field, or other such categorizations have explicit goals such as informing students of available resources or about their academic responsibilities and options, also serve the purpose of bringing students together and providing them not only with a venue

to meet one another, but a shared experience to talk and often complain about. One popular shared complaint arising in the first few days is the “juvenile” nature of many orientation activities—playing games, talking about hopes and fears, and playing introduction games, while probably themselves successful at encouraging social grouping and networking, also provides a shared experience that students can joke about and laugh at later. Describing these activities as “lame” is an almost uniform complaint from students.

Second, as we shall discuss in detail later on in the book, the physical structure of liberal arts colleges—their residential nature and small campus—also works to increase interaction amongst students, and hence amplifies the number of opportunities to meet others. A student would have to seriously go out of their way *not* to meet new people during their first few weeks. Nowhere is this clearer than in how first-years are required to have a roommate. Though many students will end up not being particularly close to their roommates, the roommate relationship provides a basic social structure for students to build off of, which, for students who might shut themselves out of first week networking opportunities, can provide them with a lifeline to a social group. Dorms, common eating halls, classes, lounges, common rooms, hallways, and even bathrooms also provide physical spaces for interaction, and all are generally populated by other students at the same time of day.

Third, student-driven activities, such as campus organizations, sports, parties, study groups, and Greek societies, can also provide venues for students to meet one another during their first few weeks. Indeed, these occasions and organizations will

continue to provide such opportunities throughout a students' time at college, though they are often most important for a student's social life during the first year.

Forth, there seems to be a kind of snowballing effect that can and often does take place when students meet one another—at the start of the first day of orientation, John might only know his roommate and a friend from high school, but by the end of the day he has met two people through his roommate, three more through his high school friend, and the next day, some of them will introduce John to more new students, who in turn have a group of other people they have met. While there are limits to how far this can and will go, it illustrates the rapid escalation of networking that many students go through early on. To some extent, this process will continue throughout college, though it is most important early on, as it is through friends that students meet the most people, and the most closely networked people—in other words, this is the process of group formation, groups that will constitute a student's social circle(s) throughout college.

In this paper I will examine the ways students make friends and network, and the forces at work that encourage and discourage such networking.

Integrating into campus culture

Let us turn to some examples of students' experiences during their first few weeks and months at college to illustrate the most common, important, and effective ways students develop their social groups—namely, dorms, organizations and social networking (touched on above).

1. Orientation

“Orientation” encompasses a variety of activities that, broadly speaking, attempt to orient students to college life by introducing them to students and faculty, outlining rules, regulations, and expectations, and explaining the various resources for students on campus. The purposes of these activities are numerous—one of them certainly is to introduce students to one another by creating artificial groups based on students’ dorms, dorm floors, and advising groups, amongst others.

The short-term success of these endeavors can be significant—orientation activities provide structured environments for students to meet one another, and make initial connections. Creating artificial groups, further, can provide students with a kind of comfort zone that allows them to network further. The long-term success for orientation activities, on the other hand, is far less: students typically do not make their best friends during pre-orientation and orientation activities.

I: On the subject of meeting people, I mean how hard did you find it to meet people, and where did you meet people?

S: I did the [Adirondack Adventure] thing.

I: Okay.

S: So that was a huge advantage when we were at orientation. And at first like I sort of went out of my way to meet people because just because you live next to someone doesn’t mean you’re going to have anything in common with them. Maybe you will, but ultimately I hang out with the

people I do things with, and a couple of people that I met like during orientation or whatever that I just clicked with.

I: Have you found that you've kept your friends from AA, or kind of moved away, or?

S: Both. Like I intersect with a couple of them doing a couple of things I do, like theatre and stuff. But other than that, like there are some people from my trip that I just never talk to anymore. [Jane 01-02]

Jane identifies her participation in a pre-orientation activity—Adirondack Adventure—as providing her with a “huge advantage” socially. Indeed, the earlier students network with each other, the sooner they will typically establish their social group and meet students who will become their closest friends.¹

2. *Dorms*

Dorms provide the venues for most students' first interactions with their peers, and thus the first situations in which they can make friends. There are a number of reasons a majority of students meet most of their first friends through their dorms.

First, the simple proximity of students, living next to one another, in the same room, down the hall, and sharing a kitchen, bathroom, and building, all significantly

¹ This raises some interesting institutional issues. Namely, it goes to the heart of the issue of whether pre-orientation activities are fair to students who do not participate in them. Essentially, pre-orientation activities give a head start to participating students, though to what extent they benefit at the expense of non-participants is not clear. One possible networking model would show the pre-orientation participants creating and defining their own social groups earlier than orientation groups, and excluding the orientation-only participants. Another model would show the same process, but with networking connections between isolated orientation-only students and groups of pre-orientation students, meaning that pre-orientation activities can also benefit non-participants.

increase the likelihood that students will run into one another and have a chance to interact. For Anne, “Living in the dorms has probably been the best part of being here I think just because it’s like a sleepover like 24/7. And it’s like you’re living with your friends” [Anne 01-02]

Second, such interaction is not intentional—a student *cannot help* but live in a dorm and have dorm mates:

In my hall there are three rooms basically. A triple of boys, a quad of boys, and my quad of girls. And we’re extremely like tight-knit, and it’s very entertaining down there. It’s almost like it’s not part of the real world because we’re so close, it’s just like things just happens that’s funny. It just might be because we’ve become close friends not necessarily by choice, but because we live with one another. [Liz 01-02]

Setting matters, as it provides the students with something to talk about: neighbors joke about the poor state of the bathrooms in the dorm, or whether they both know some other people on their floor, or where their rooms are. Dorms provide a *de facto* shared experience, and hence content for discussion to break down the basic anxiety of introductions and small talk. Further the repetitive nature of the encounter—students see their dorm mates and neighbors numerous times in a day—makes it nearly impossible for students not to develop some kind of relationship with their neighbors.

I think it would be hard not to make new friends, but especially in my dorm, I think like our dorm is unbelievably close... I mean it's not one of the larger dorms, but it seems like most every freshman knows every other freshman will hang out with them. I mean it's really, it's really good there I think. Outside of that, I mean I know a lot of other guys outside, but still I feel like a tight bond within Kirkland I guess. [james 01-02]

You're really kind of just placed in this setting with a lot of different people, especially [in] the first couple of weeks and no one knows each other. You don't feel bad just like going up to somebody and going like hey, I'm Alex. Everyone's in the same boat so you don't feel bad meeting people, and once you've met people, who you actually end up hanging out with is another matter altogether. But I mean, I've become pretty close friends with people on my floor just because we're just always around, you know. [Alex 01-02]

That dorms are a fruitful means of initially making friends should not be terribly surprising. The intensity of exposure students have to one another is highest in dorms, the dorms provide shared experiences (good and bad) for students to talk about, and students see their dorm mates more frequently than most other groups on campus. Further, when students are still attempting to learn the social ropes of the school, they have little sense of the social structure of the school, and hence lack the ability to know what group to anchor themselves to. Dorms provide a de factor identity and group membership for

many students who are too hesitant or shy to seek these out elsewhere, or simply for students who want another channel of networking.

First-year housing is structured so as to make it easy for students to make initial contacts with other students, and to provide a baseline of friends, from which students can branch out, and eventually develop a close circle of friends. As we have outlined elsewhere, a great deal of the liberal arts college itself is structured (both by the college and by students) to make it easy for students to meet and interact, and first-year housing is one of the first cases of this kind of social engineering that students will encounter.

3. Activities

As soon as the first week, many students begin participating in extracurricular activities, which can range from clubs and sports to organizations and volunteer work. For first-year students, these activities can be a primary way in which they meet others. Almost regardless of the kind of activity, the student will be participating with other students, and not only have contact with those students, but also have a shared experience with them. Here we will look at how the type of activity students participate in can shape their first-year social world, and also some of the social patterns that emerge from the relationships between students' extracurricular participation and their social lives, such as how increased interaction between students of different class years in extracurriculars diminishes the social importance of class year.

A. SPORTS

For most of the students who participate in them, sports teams constitute their primary circle of closest friends. Significantly, sports start at the very beginning of the first semester, sometimes even in the summer, meaning that this group of students will spend long hours with each other right from the start, all participating in the same activity, and in a competitive, physical, and high-stress environment. The bonding process between teammates is obvious, and it is little wonder that student athletes' closest group of friends will almost always be their teammates, whether the student is a first-year or a senior.

Yeah, it has been very easy [to make friends]. Like crew helped a lot... had I not done crew, I would probably have a different set of friends, but it was definitely easy to make them. [Jen 01-02]

When I started playing, we started having meetings for softball and I started playing softball, and I was on the [team] so I got to meet people from here and there from that, and like I'm really good friends with a lot of the girls on the team.[Marie 01-02]

Student athletes emphasized how the intensity of the activity and the shared experience of learning to improve helped bind them to their teammates:

I: Like where do you find that you're meeting these friends?

S: Crew. I have a good friend that live on the third floor that does it, a novice too, so if like we bonded together as learning how to row.

I: So has crew been, what do you think of crew so far in respect of like a social outlet?

S: I feel like I've gotten to know my boat really well, and obviously there's a distinction between novice and varsity. But I mean we somewhat met them, like I'm going to Pennsylvania for the regatta, and we definitely met people on the bus. It's nice to have a few people that are waking up at 5:30 and rowing with you. And we're like yeah, great, you're here too.

[laura 01-02]

S: We spend a lot of time together honestly, practicing so it's a lot easier to relate to those guys than just say some other person because you're always around them basically, and their lifestyle is a lot like yours. You have to really kind of manage your time a lot differently than someone that doesn't have to wake up really early in the morning to go to practice.

I: Yeah.

S: And then practice at night too. Your whole lifestyle kind of changes once the season comes along. Just naturally because you're always around them because they're going through the same things that

you're going through. It's a lot easier to relate to them I think. [frank 02-03]

The amount of time the students will spend together (quantity), and the intensity of their experience (quality) will typically² have a directly positive effect on their solidarity as friends, a relationship that explains why first years who join sports teams overwhelmingly find the most and closest friends on those teams.³

B. SOCIETIES

For students who join them, Greek societies will constitute a significant portion of their social life—they will develop many, if not most of their friends within their society, and much of their social life will be related to their societies activities and members. The process of joining a society begins early—far before pledging and even rushing—it effectively begins when students start to develop their first social groups, meet other people whom they might pledge with, and interact with members of the society. For example, Jay found himself being pursued by a fraternity, and met a good deal of new people that way:

As a freshman, fraternities are really interested in if I was having to pledge and whatnot. They would always make sure, at least mine did, [that] you're invited to things and they want you to come out and meet other people and get you sort of involved in the social scene. And they really

² Though there are cases where this makes bad relationships worse.

³ In our panel, this relationship was without exception, though some athletes did comment that they had a close group of friends outside of sports in addition to that of their sports team.

did that, and I was impressed that they go out and actually seek the kids they want to hang out with. And I thought that was, especially as a freshman, just coming into a new school I was, it made me really sort of maybe want to engage the Hamilton social scene I guess... [I met one of my best friends] through football, and then he joined my fraternity. And another through a high school friend of mine, who then also joined my fraternity. So we really started to be friends before we all joined a fraternity; and then just being in the fraternity together, [and] all three of us roomed together, that really solidified our friendship, and we've gone on vacation with each other and done all the things that, we've just become very, very close. [jay 03-04]

Thus, despite the fact that the formal process of joining the group takes place much later in the year, a student's social circle is influenced by their deliberation about and preparation for joining in much the same way as a student's social life is influenced by participation in any student activity. The actual bonding process between society members, however, does take place at another time, and so we will save our discussion of it for later.

C. A CAPELLA AND CHOIR

Aside from sports and societies, students most frequently discussed their participation in A Capella choir groups as significantly shaping their first-year social worlds. As with sports, students in A Capella groups spend a great deal of time with their

fellow singers in a high-stress, coordinated, performance-driven, team environment. Further, these students rarely have time for much else, as the time demands from singing tend to dominate outside of classes.

[Freshman year] you come and like there's like 70 people and you don't know anybody. And then about halfway through, you generally do a play or a musical, and everybody sort of bonds in like January when you get back from spring break. And since freshman year, they've just been my family. And you go on tour and there's 70 people, which is a lot. But by the end of the year, you sort of have found the particular 15 or 20 that you see around campus all the time, that you have the same classes with; and they've sort of just been like a community, if that makes any sense [judy 04-05]

A lot of my friends are people from choir or from Tumbling After, or people I met through them, which I kind of like because I like the people I work with. I feel like a lot of the people I knew, but am not like close with any more my freshman year, I feel like they may have a big group of friends who are the people they live next to. I think that probably happens a lot to people who are less involved in less time intensive activities than I am, and like that's cool, but I mean what do you have in common? Like why are you friends with the person who lives next door to you? I guess it works sometimes. Like my best friend here doesn't do any of the same

things I do. She's my roommate now, but I didn't live with her. I met her through some people I lived with. So I don't know. It just worked out well I guess.

I: And how are they affecting your experience?

S: I think it's the usual college drama because, you know, that's what happens when people live together. But you know, mostly it's good. I have people to have fun with and to go to when I'm not happy, and like you know, I do it for them, and I don't know. I mean it's like having friends everywhere else, except they live right down the hall.

[jane 02-03]

S: ... And also a lot of my friends are also in the Buffers, which I'm in. I live with them. It's an a cappella group, and I live with them this year so we've gotten closer than last year.

I: What do you think you've gained from like being part of [the Buffers]...?

S: Well, as I said before I live with the guys in choir group, so I've gained like kind of an extra group of friends. It's kind of like a B fraternity. [John 01-02]

S: ... I guess I'd say, I guess like I would say like in like organizations and groups, you know. That's like pretty much like a big place that you are to

meet people, and you get to like talk to them more often. Because like on the weekends, parties, yeah you socialize, and like, but it's like you tend to socialize with the people you already know. You don't really socialize with anybody else. But like in organizations and in groups, you do.

[Victoria 01-02]

For many student singers, their choral groups almost totally constitute their circle of friends during their first year, which is why John commented that his A Capella group is like a "B fraternity"—the intensity of the social experience is the same, though the specific activity may differ.

D. POROUS CLASS YEARS

Extracurriculars are also one of the main ways first-year students develop contacts with students of other years. Many first-years seemed surprised at how porous class year boundaries were in the campus' social scene, especially compared to their high school experiences, where class year is much more of a solid barrier to social interaction. According to students, there appears to be little hierarchical organization by class year:

S: It didn't really feel like I was isolated [freshman year]. You know, I got to know plenty of upper classmen at the same time I got to know freshmen. I didn't feel too cut off.

I: How did you get to meet your upperclassmen friends?

S: Shared interests usually or other friends, friends of friends. [Mark 01-02]

I: ... I started to meet people just through hockey and stuff like that more like upper classmen, juniors, seniors, and more sophomores.

I: More sophomores, uh-huh

S: I don't know, and throughout the year I got to meet people in my own class. [Tom 01-02]

S: And the musical a cappella/theatre thing, is both helpful because I get to party with upper classmen, and like meet them, and it's also sort of restricted because I don't really know the people I live next to all that well because I'm never there.

I: That's a give and take, yeah.

S: Yeah. [Jane 01-02]

S: I've met a lot of upper classmen... who have introduced me to more upper classmen, which is what I was saying before. It's really hard for freshman to meet upper classmen. [susie johnston 01-02]

The diminished importance of class year for social status in college is likely due to the greater interaction between members of different class years than in high school. This hierarchy is probably also reduced between members of groups such as campus

organizations and Greek societies, where internal hierarchies within the groups are more important.⁴ To outsiders, fraternity brothers are *brothers*, regardless of their class year. Editors of the paper are all *editors*. Members of the defensive team of a college's football program are *teammates*, not freshmen, sophomores, etc. Internally, however, there may be a strict status hierarchy, which might well correspond to class years. To the outside world, though, members of the group retain their group's status. This point is politically important, tying in to issues of individual versus group responsibility and identity, which, in relation to Greek societies, has become a hotbed of media and public attention in recent years. We will return to this point later on in the book. [REMINDER: do this]

4. Networking

Sarah found, like a majority of students, that her roommates and two friends from soccer were her initial source of friends,⁵ and that this group in turn introduced her to other students:

As far as making friends, my roommates and I for the first couple weeks just kind of stuck together. We have sort of a group of friends that we're all connected in some way and it's actually really weird when we sit down and think about how we all know each other from different people that we

⁴ Though these internal hierarchies may to some degree reflect a year-based hierarchy, such as officers of a sorority, editors of a newspaper, etc.

⁵ We should note that when students use the word "friends," they do not necessarily mean their closest group of friends, but often use this word as a catch-all not just for their closest friends, but also for students they know and are on good terms with but don't spend much time with, and sometimes even just acquaintances and friends of friends. The slippery nature of this word is itself significant, as it indicates the vast variety of types of friendship that students can experience. We will use the word as students do—to denote a variety of types of friendship and acquaintanceship, and specify the type when appropriate.

have friends in common from high school... And as far as meeting people, I think I've met more people through other people, than I have in like with classes and stuff like that. [And also I met] two [friends] on the soccer team that I made in the beginning of the year, and now I have five friends on the soccer team because we just met through people. [Sarah 01-02]

Other students had similar success meeting friends through friends, likely because, in these social situations where a student is meeting new people, they know at least one other person, significantly increasing their comfort in that situation:

S: I met a lot of people through the football team. I also met a lot of teammate's friends, like my teammates and their friends that are not on the football team. [john 01-02]

I: Tell me a little bit about how you met your friends at Hamilton, like through what sort of like avenue was it, dorms, classes, activities?

S: The friends that I have now, let's see, I met... So I kept saying hi to them, and then I'd see them at parties and I talk to them, and slowly I'd meet them and I'd meet their friends. I just say hi to everybody, and slowly people responded to that. [Reanna 01-02]

I: If you could just tell me briefly how you met your friends here at Hamilton.

S: The majority I met because we lived together. It was me and my two roommates, and the quad of girls from across the hall. Outside of that, it was people I met on Adirondack Adventure. And then from there, it kind of branched out to other roommates and other acquaintances and other friends. My group of friends is really big. [Ashley 01-02]

Given that once students know at least a small handful of others, their network of friends and acquaintances naturally grows (up to a certain limit) almost exponentially, making those first friends is key, a process that typically originates in dorm rooms, then dorms, and can also be generated a little later on through participation in organizations.

Exclusivity as the residue of group formation

Numerous students commented how, by the second semester of their first year, social groups had cemented into exclusive cliques, a pattern that distressed many students who were excited about the social openness of their first semester:

I feel like in the beginning freshman year all the freshmen were really friendly to each other. They're all trying to find people who they feel will be their good friends, or even just their friends for now, whatever, maybe someone to eat with, you know. The activity is that they just don't want to be doing it alone. And then once people kind of start to like find their

friends, like immediately all like all relations are cut off. Like who cares, you know, oh I haven't met you yet? Well, you're probably not worth being my friend anyways. Who cares because I already have friends. I don't need you. So I feel like that attitude really develops kind of early. At the same time, however, I mean in small settings like, you know, the classroom or whatever, I feel like it's easy kind of to make bonds I guess with people. [sasha smith 02-03]

This anxiety about exclusion is common amongst students. For students, exclusion, more so than hierarchical popularity, which is another organizational culture that many students found in high school, is the most negative aspect of social life at college. Exclusion, however, is a part of a community's organizational culture in and of itself, and arises out of the natural process of building social networks, and developing groups of friends.

Group formation is the defining characteristic of the social life of students in their first year, and an essential part of group formation is the exclusion of outsiders—any group necessarily has boundaries, and while this does not mean that group members are consciously exclusionary of non-members, there is a degree of exclusivity inherent in any group. This exclusivity (or at least the feeling of it by outsiders) can increase in groups that have spent more time together, such as with students who attended a pre-orientation outdoors camping experience:

The first week two of my roommates went on Adirondack Adventure, and I didn't... During that first couple of weeks everyone knows people from Adirondack Adventure, and it's just hard, I mean even though a lot of kids didn't go on it, you just don't feel as connected. I think a lot of kids I've talked to that didn't go just didn't know it was that important. I wish I had gone on it now just because I could save a little bit of that. [Kim Smith 01-02]

This exclusivity can also be magnified in cases where the group is centered around some kind of formal activity, like a sports team, where people who aren't a part of the team simply have not shared the same experiences as the team—they don't get the inside jokes and don't understand the language and character of the group.

Students are highly attuned to the feeling of exclusion—most have experienced it in great quantities in high school, and all students who discussed it, described how they hated the clique-based nature of their social life before college, and hoped that college was different. Most students, however, quickly found that the same forms of exclusion were also present at college, and that they developed within the student body in a matter of days.

While we can recognize this process as a natural one—indeed, group formation and the exclusion of outsiders go hand in hand—students frequently disdain it, despite the fact that they are no doubt a part of its creation and perpetuation. Only one student offered a rationalization of this process:

S: I thought it was pretty easy [to make friends] last year. It was kind of funny the way I did it because I was actually talking to my roommate and my, and my two other closest friends about meeting people this year. It's not so much harder to meet people this year, it's, since you already have your really tight group of friends, you're less apt to go out and try to meet new people since you're kind of satisfied with who you're around and who your friends are already. And I guess I can kind of see adapting, but then again there's a reason why you don't, you know, extend yourself all the time because you already have your tight group of friends.

I: So you've sort of found your niche?

S: Yeah. [frank 02-03]

Frank's explanation was unique—most students saw exclusivity as a one-dimensional phenomenon, where they were excluded from a group, instead of also seeing the phenomenon from the perspective of the group, where exclusivity is a necessary and natural social process.

There are a number of factors that may contribute to the general sense students have that groups of students exclude one another. First, we might hypothesize that the feeling of being excluded is greater in smaller communities, where members more easily recognize each other's status as member or non-member of a given group. Second, in communities where there is greater interaction—even if it is just walking past someone else—between two given individuals, such as on small campuses, the feeling of exclusion will also increase. Third, small communities in which a given individual can be aware of

all or most of the different groups that exist will increase the feeling of exclusion—students know the names and memberships of the fraternities and sororities, know who is on what sports team, know what students sit at the round table in the cafe, what students hang out in the library, what students live in suite 4A, and know that they do not belong to any of these groups. Hence, in a small, residential college, where a given student is generally aware of who belongs to what group, and who spends time where and with whom, and where this student regularly sees other students (probably as much as 30% of the student population) throughout the day, once social groups form, the sensation of exclusion can be quite strong.

Our painting of this rather bleak picture of a social world that quickly ossifies into rigid social cliques does not completely do it justice. To be sure, there is a great deal of flexibility between groups—some students can occupy a number of groups at once, in the same way that students can be members of a sorority, sport, major, and a number of organizations at once. Reanna and Sasha make just this point, comparing high school to their first experiences in college:

When I first got here, I was scared. I was scared of everyone. It was kind of like high school to me again at first because everyone was just forming their cliques really fast and trying to get groups of stuff with people. But it's not like high school. There are cliques, but they're not as rigid as high school is. Like there's not a necessary social hierarchy, but there is a slight one. [Reanna 01-02]

S: There are still cliques I guess. But at the same time, maybe it's because clearly there are more people so there are more of them, and so like they're just, it doesn't seem nearly as important anymore. It never really seemed that important to me, but still there were always like the stigmas like the girls who wore like the ass-tight black pants and like walked around with like their chest like this. You know, like shoulders back, like hooking up with every guy in sight, like they were like the cool girls, you know, because they were like bitches to everyone, and like that made them really cool. And like I've seen people like that here, but at the same time it's like, you know, like you can do what you want to do and hang with your group, and you can be whatever you think you are, but like it doesn't really matter.

I: So like the clique thing matters less here than high school?

S: Yeah, yeah, I think so. [sasha smith 01-02]

Further, these groups will have varying levels of exclusivity, depending on the factors outlined above.

Also, not all members of solidified social groups are happy with how exclusive *their own* social world is. Some students noted that they were dissatisfied with how their fraternity or sport dominated their time and social energy, and that they had trouble making friends and meeting people outside of these ossified groups:

I think because of swimming, it kept me away from people outside the sport... that's when you're supposed to hang out with your roommates in that two month period. I didn't like my roommates, so I didn't really hang out with my roommates I started swimming on kind of like hung out with the team, and then like after swimming was over, I kind of like, I'm like a friend of the team but not like great friends. It's not like I would call them up to do something, so I started to meet some friends through like classes, and friends through them, and you know, that's basically, that's kind of how I did it actually, just through class. [Jane 01-02]

S: Especially during pledging, like I'd want to hang out with my other friends. I mean my roommate, I had a roommate that I really liked. I had a couple other buddies that lived down the hall, and I mean there's times when all the, when all my fraternity brothers expect you, I mean, come on let's hang out tonight. And it's just like well, I want to do this with my buddy. And come on, we're in your fraternity. I mean it's just, it is hard but I do find time. But it's just like, I mean you have to sacrifice so much I guess.

I: You have to put a little extra effort into it?

S: Yeah. I wish all my friends were in my fraternity. That would be unbelievable. [james 02-03]

Exclusivity is a double edged sword for students—it allows groups to increase their solidarity, but also creates barriers to outsiders. While the negative side of this process seems to be less significant than in high school for most, it is still distressing for students who wish they could maintain the social openness of the first semester. We will return to issues of exclusivity throughout this book, as it will continue to contribute to the shape of campus social life and the climate of the culture.

Concluding remarks

A student's first year is dominated by finding and solidifying a social group, a process that requires students to meet a great deal of their peers, which in turn is aided by a number of things such as orientation activities, the residential campus, extracurriculars, and exponential networking. The way students meet one another, and the mediums through which they make friends and develop social groups, have profound effects on both individual students' social futures, and the social organization of campus culture. A student's decision to participate in certain activities such as sports, societies, and A Capella groups, will significantly shape their social circles. At the same time, the rapid solidification of social groups means that students who act early tend to benefit the most, and that students who do not, can find themselves in limited social situations. On the cultural level, we see that the increased exposure of first-years to upperclassmen through extracurriculars diminishes the importance of a student's class year to their place in the campus' social hierarchy, though hierarchy certainly exists along different lines.