

Coming of Age's NJ

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CA 3 THREE / A Year on Hasbrouck Fourth

A DORMITORY IS A PLACE TO STORE POSSESSIONS AND SLEEP AT NIGHT—BUT A RESIDENCE HALL IS MUCH MORE. IT IS AN INTERDEPENDENT COMMUNITY WHERE STUDENTS CARE ABOUT AND RESPECT ONE ANOTHER AND A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE CAN SHARE AND LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.—Shaping a Community: A Guide to Residence Life at Rutgers College

COMMUNITY?

Rutgers students enjoyed much of the fun of college life, especially in their freshman and sophomore years, on their coed dorm floors among the sixty other young women and men with whom they happened to share the same level of a college residence hall in any given year. They did not need to form personal groups with these particular youths. The students could have lived anonymously in the dorms, side by side like strangers in a New York apartment house.¹ But their own peer culture, and the deans, encouraged them to link up with everyone else on their floor. And on nearly one hundred dorm floors at Rutgers every year, they almost invariably did so.

The deans characterized these student groups in an officialese that was uniquely their own. It emphasized student choice and it obfuscated deanly authority. Dorm floors should be “interdependent communities of caring individuals” who “enhanced their college experiences” together, the deans recommended. The deans “fostered” student “community-building” through the “residence life” infrastructure, through “role-models,” “mediation,” “programming,” “non-credit courses,” and “hall government.” Power did not really exist in this voluntaristic world of deanly fantasy. Collective standards somehow emerged without agents; the deans were simply the custodians of an impersonal democratic process:

To protect the rights of all students, community standards have been developed. The Residence Life staff strives to uphold these standards. They provide constraints for those students who demonstrate an unwillingness to monitor their own behavior without unduly inhibiting the freedoms of those students who do. With the support of all community members, behavior problems can be kept to a minimum.²

The students thought about these same groups in somewhat different ways.³ They recognized deanly authority and power, to begin with. As my student preceptor on Gate Third in 1977 put it, "There are some mean things I have to do." But if the deans believed that *they* "developed" the undergraduates through residence life—that the shaping of the students' extracurricular values was their expert task—the undergraduates, conversely, saw the dorms at their best as places for real student autonomy. The less a given dorm activity was obviously influenced by the deans, the better the undergraduates in the residence halls tended to enjoy it.

Like the deans, the students also wanted the dorm floors to be amiable places without lots of personal conflict on them. But the term "community," like "residence hall," rarely passed from their lips. Somehow "community" made the dorm floor groups sound much more earnest and intentional than they really were in student experience. A good dorm floor, most students believed, should be a relaxed place full of girls and guys who "got along," who were able to enjoy the informal pleasures of college life in an easy, personal atmosphere of their own making. Rather than being communities, dorm floors, according to student conceptions, should simply be "friendly places."

"Community" was a suspect term for another reason: its established position in the official rhetoric of late-twentieth-century American individualism. For, in addition to being open, friendly individuals (see chapter 2), well-socialized American adults in the 1980s are supposed to desire community. Real communities in Western or Third World societies consist of people who have to get along with one another on a daily basis. They usually do not have much choice about the matter. Real communities thus constrain or even define the individual. A village in south India is one example; a department of tenured faculty members in an American university is another. "Community," in its contemporary American ideological sense, on the other hand, is often an individualistic concept masquerading as a sociological one. It usually means something like "people who choose

to live together or work together due to common interests." Moreover, it is a word used by leaders, spokespersons, and publicists much more often than it is by ordinary folk. The late-twentieth-century political meaning of "community" tends to be "people who *ought* to choose to live or work together due to some common interest, as defined by me."

These meanings aside, "community," like "diversity" and the other key phrases of modern American individualism, is almost empty of specific content. It no longer even necessarily has to refer to a face-to-face group with a small, well-defined territorial base. Thus, cartoonist Gary Trudeau can make one of his characters belong to "the homeless community." Thus, Rutgers undergraduates can live in the "greater New York community," the "Rutgers community," the "undergraduate community" and their own "dorm communities."⁴

Communities or not, the friendly groups of students who formed on every dorm floor every year at Rutgers did have certain recurrent sociological characteristics in common, however. Their human ingredients: undergraduates from similar provincial suburban hometowns of central and northern New Jersey. Their cultural contexts: contemporary American popular culture in its late-adolescent version, "college life" and American individualism as sources of shared interests and values among many of the residents. Their ecologies: similar spatial layouts for student sociability. Their micropolitical structures: standard bureaucratized systems of local control under the supervision of the deans (residence counselors, preceptors, and so on). And an ideal: a loosely formulated but very pervasive one concerning collective harmony or friendliness.

No two dorm floors ever worked out alike, however, and neither floor community nor floor friendliness was easily achieved. Most actual dorm floor groups amounted to varying mixes of collective success and failure. The members of every dorm floor acted out, over the course of a year of common residence and personal acquaintanceship, their own collective dramas, which they themselves reviewed and summed up now and again. This chapter is the story of one such annual student collectivity as I was able to know it, on the fourth floor of Hasbrouck Hall, where I did research a day and night a week in the academic year starting in 1984. Who were the main actors? What was the stage on which they performed? And what collective script did they write, half-deliberately and half-accidentally, in collaboration with one another all year long?⁵

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

By the time I moved onto Hasbrouck Fourth in early September 1984, I was an old pro in the dorms, a veteran of three freshman orientations and one previous full year of day-a-week residence. I knew one other dorm-floor group through intensive firsthand participant observation (see chapter 4); I knew another dozen or more through more casual observations and through research papers written by my students in cultural anthropology. And, at first in 1984, Hasbrouck Fourth seemed to be loaded with potential for the best kind of lively, sociable relationships among its student residents.

The Preceptor

The leading actor, Pete, the senior preceptor, appeared to be a capable and experienced student leader. He initiated residence life on the floor at the beginning of the year with some esprit, putting the new freshmen through the required deanly rituals of orientation, "icebreakers" and the rest, more vigorously than many other preceptors did. And he promoted the floor with what sounded like real enthusiasm. He had lived in Hasbrouck Hall all four years at Rutgers, he told the freshmen, and the year before he had also been the preceptor on Hasbrouck Fourth. And the floor had been lots of fun last year. It had had great parties; it had organized its own spring "semiformal" at a nearby hotel; it had even designed its own T-shirt. Pete held up an example, a bright red shirt bearing a vigorous, crudely drawn King Kong who danced on the roof of the dorm (Hasbrouck Fourth was the top floor of Hasbrouck Hall), partying and terrorizing passing students in the street below. This year, Pete promised the new students, they could have just as good a floor if they worked at it. Many of last year's residents were coming back. "Wait till you meet them," Pete promised the freshmen. "They're *crazy!* They're also very diverse!"

In my first few days on Hasbrouck Fourth, I was so impressed with Pete that I kidded a residence life dean about him. The dean had placed me on a floor with a preceptor this good, I claimed, so that the Rutgers residence life program would look particularly good in my research.⁶

More privately a few days later, however, Pete expressed some reservations about his job in 1984. Last year, though he had been the local au-

thority, he had also been very much one of the boys—enjoying floor fun himself, keeping the lid on it, making sure that no one on Hasbrouck Fourth got in trouble with any higher authorities. Over the summer, however, he said he felt he'd "grown up a lot." He had gone off to a summer program in France (posters of the French countryside adorned his walls) and had established a serious romance with a woman from a nearby college, who would be staying with him in his room on weekends. "I don't know if I can take all this any more," he said in a moment of meditation about what now seemed to him like the juvenilities of dorm culture. "I want to get on with my life."

Pete also had ambitious academic plans for his senior year: a senior honors thesis in his major, psychology, and a good graduate school subsequently; or, if that did not work out, high school teaching as a "fallback strategy." He was also finishing up a certificate in education and was scheduled for practice teaching in a nearby public high school in the fall. Hasbrouck Fourth would have to be a mature floor, Pete warned the freshmen during orientation. The residents would have to learn to get along with one another without having a preceptor around all the time to mind them.

Other Upperclassmen

Many of the returning students soon lived up to their notices. Most of them were sophomores. In 1984–1985, 85 percent of residents of Hasbrouck Fourth were freshmen and sophomores, not uncommon percentages in the Rutgers dorms. But, more atypically, the sophomores outnumbered the freshmen, thirty-five to eighteen.⁷ The two college classes were also skewed by sex. Thirteen of the eighteen freshmen on the floor were females, while twenty-three of the thirty-five sophomores were males. A rowdy year seemed possible. The sexual year was more difficult to predict.

Among the returning residents, it was difficult to miss Dan and his friends, six variously extroverted, assertive, and physically big sophomore males.⁸ Dan was a good-looking young man from a north Jersey city, a major in economics; but he studied so little in his sophomore year that he almost flunked out. He had a vivid personal style, a strong white ethnic identity, and his first love was theater; he was minoring in it. A poster of the young Marlon Brando had pride-of-place on his wall. Dan and four of his friends lived on the same side of the floor as I did, on the "low side," named for its lower room numbers, 401 through 414. A sixth friend, Tim,

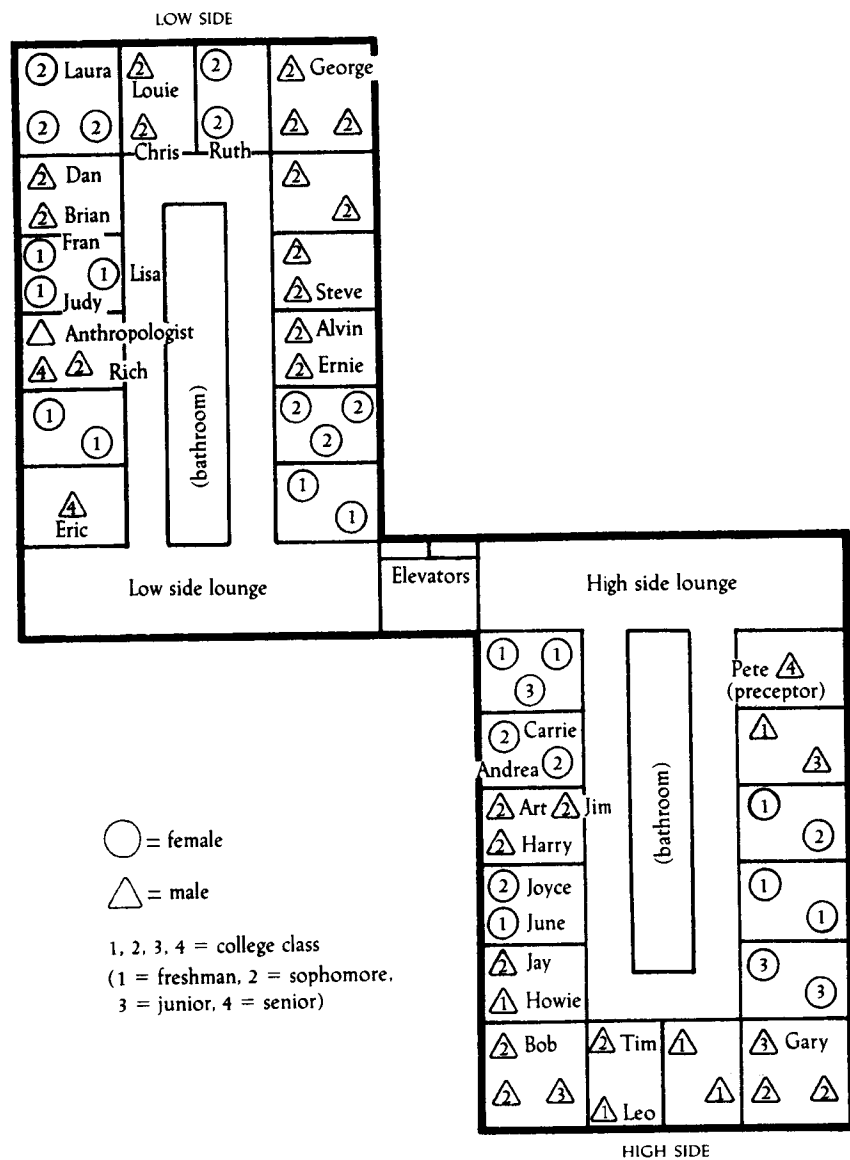


FIGURE 2 / Hasbrouck Fourth, 1984-1985 (not to scale)
(some architectural details changed or omitted)

a second-generation Japanese-American, had been stranded over on the "high side" (rooms 415 through 428) by the luck of the room lottery. All these youths had lived next to one another on Hasbrouck Fourth the year before (see figure 2).⁹

Dan and his friends were very friendly toward the new freshmen, especially toward some of the new freshman females. Only one of them had any erotic success with any of these young women, however, and a few months later they were noticeably less friendly. Among themselves, Dan and his friends spoke in a colorful, ever-changing argot that marked the boundaries of their clique. Dumb people or losers were "Zekes"—but by an odd linguistic inversion, they themselves were also Zekes. Anything inauthentic was "bogus." "Good-bye" was "I'm outta here" or "I'm history." Being certain about anything was being "etched" on it (from the expression "etched in stone"). Napping was "catchin' zees."¹⁰

Living near these characters were Louie and his roommate Chris. Louie was a charming hustler, a self-proclaimed womanizer, and another economics major.¹¹ Louie also made some early attempts to date several of the new women on the floor but then lost interest. Chris was quieter and had an old high-school girlfriend to whom he was trying to be faithful. Louie and Chris had won the Best Roommates award on Hasbrouck Fourth the previous year. They posed for my camera one day in the fall, holding their award, taking the male 'homosexual ironic' stance (see chapter 2)—dressed only in shorts, Louie up against Chris, dollar bills stuffed in his shorts like a go-go dancer, a leg thrown intimately over Chris's thigh. They spent much of their leisure time in the first few months in the company of the girls in the next room, two pretty young women who smiled a lot and almost always allowed themselves to be dominated in public by Louie.

On the high side, I also noticed Bob and his roommates early in the semester, two sophomores and a junior, all of them new to Hasbrouck Fourth. Everyone on the floor soon referred to them as the "DUK brothers," for their fraternity, whose activities filled their talk and whose emblems filled their room. Bob was brash and friendly; his roommates kept more to themselves. Also on the high side were Gary and his two roommates, two more returning sophomores and one junior. They seemed rather self-contained, though two of them did sit around regularly in the lounge in a friendly fashion. But they looked tough; they looked as if they lifted weights. The third, whom we hardly ever saw, spent a great deal of time in ROTC activities. Since the year before, he had been known on Hasbrouck Fourth as "Soldier Sam." Uniquely among the residents of the

floor, Soldier Sam never consented to be interviewed and never filled out any of the eight or nine brief questionnaires that I circulated to the residents over the nine months of my research on Hasbrouck Fourth. Over the year, I found myself developing a certain respect for the purity of his attitude toward being a subject of research.

One last sophomore friendship group was very visible on Hasbrouck Fourth from early September. One member was Carrie, a lively black woman with a punk haircut. She was unusually assertive and outspoken for a woman in the dorms, as likely to initiate "busting" as any male (see chapter 2)—a politically aware student who seemed to enjoy challenging conventional opinions wherever she encountered them. Andrea, her white roommate, was a very close friend. The two of them shared artistic interests and, at the beginning of the year, an active, unattached social life. To my male eyes, Andrea was also an exceptionally sexy young woman; and in the first month or two, she flaunted her sexuality more openly than most females did in the ordinary erotic etiquette of the coed living group, I thought (see chapter 5).

Art, one of their next-door neighbors, was tall, intense, unpredictable, and every bit as vivid a personality as Carrie. He liked to play mental games with people, defending his ego with frequent, well-performed comic routines, many of them based on characters created by comedians Eddie Murphy and Joe Piscopo on the TV show "Saturday Night Live." His roommate Harry was quieter but no more conventional. Harry's central personal value was what he called "bizarrrity." He enjoyed wearing odd clothing combinations and saying odd things, and he patronized movies with names like *Skin Heads*, *Moving Men from Outer Space*, and *Repo Man*. Jim, their roommate, seemed to be just a pleasant, regular guy with a good word for everyone.

Joyce and June, their next-door neighbors, struck me as similarly uncomplicated. June, the only freshman in this friendship group, simply seemed happy to be included in a sophomore clique at all. Joyce was a pretty kid with a sunny disposition. She had a boyfriend somewhere else, but she seemed fond of Harry, and he appeared to like her in return.

There were also some free-floaters among the sophomores on Hasbrouck Fourth, I realized in early September, residents who were not part of any of the larger cliques on the floor. One of my favorites was Ruth, who had switched to Rutgers after her freshman year at Douglass, Rutgers's old sister school. Ruth evidently studied all the time—in her room, in the library, or half-seriously in the low-side lounge. Another free-floater

was Steve, also a low-sider, who had achieved a straight A average as a freshman but as a sophomore was shifting his energies away from academics and into student journalism, on which he said he was spending forty hours a week in the fall. At the end of my first month on Hasbrouck Fourth, Steve published a well-written story about my research in one of the student newspapers, which made it easier for me to introduce myself to new undergraduate subjects for some weeks to come. ("Did you read about that professor in the *Review* who's studying students? Well, I'm him.") He wore a neat beard and looked older than the average Hasbrouck Fourth resident; he looked a little like a young assistant professor. And I found out later that, in the early days of the semester before I had met everyone personally on the floor, he had told a few residents that *he* was the rumored anthropologist on the floor and that they should tell *him* all their secrets.

A third free-floater was Jay, a returning sophomore on the high side. Jay worked very hard at his joint majors, English and political science. I sometimes read over his papers for him, and he did good work. He tended to dress preppie, he had the style of a smart know-it-all, and he bragged occasionally about his rich, well-traveled father. Jay was not the most popular resident of Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985, but as far as I could tell, the other students did not actively discriminate against him, not in the friendly ambience of the floor lounges, at least. He was often right there at the center of the informal talk sessions, expressing himself as forcefully as anyone else.

THE STAGE

The residents of Hasbrouck Fourth were housed as they were on most dorm floors at Rutgers in the 1980s, two and three to a room, alternating by sex as one moved along the corridors (see figure 2). The rooms were small and utilitarian. Their tile floors were uncarpeted; each contained a desk, a chair, a dresser, and a bed for each resident, plus a few lights; and the residents had between about fifty and eighty square feet of floor space per person.¹² There was no air conditioning, and in the muggy heat of the early fall and the late spring, I sometimes caught myself thinking back fondly on my field site, on my comfortable, airy thatched hut in a south Indian low-caste hamlet.

Each room looked out on the world through an aluminum-framed

double window (see map 1, chapter 1). For me, the view ameliorated the crowding within. Nearby were other high-rise dorms, all built in the 1950s in a style that could be called Low-rent Institutional Modern. Only the red brick in their rectilinear walls referred to older types of American college architecture. To the southeast were prettier parts of the campus: the lovely Federalist and Gothic Revival buildings of the original college, now monopolized by the upper administration of "Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey"; early-twentieth-century classroom buildings covered with ivy; and fraternity row, rather a tacky one by the standards of most older American colleges. Just north ran the Raritan river—gulls and Canada geese and ducks all year long, egrets and other waterfowl in the spring—and the greener park and suburban treeline beyond. Down the river to the right was the bridge to my hometown. From the top floor of a nearby dorm, I could almost see the roof of my little two-story house a mile and a half away.

Back in the dorm, the interiors of the student rooms did not remain institutional looking for long. Soon they were full of astonishing amounts of personal paraphernalia: rugs, stereos, tape decks, record and tape collections, TVs and VCRs, small refrigerators, hot plates, hot pots, microwave ovens, beer bottle collections, bars for liquor, athletic equipment, stuffed-animal collections and other juvenile items—a rubber ducky and a small plastic train set in one male's room on Hasbrouck Fourth—the occasional illegal waterbed. Even books! Individualism penetrated the rooms. Roommates expected each other to respect personal property; roommates who were close friends still almost always decorated their walls separately ("This wall's mine, that one's yours").

No two rooms were identical in decor, but recurrent motifs included good-looking, minimally-clad young adults of the opposite sex, which were about as common and about as near-nude in women's rooms as in men's, and favorite stars of music, television, and the movies. Males were more likely to display athletic equipment, the paraphernalia of drinking, and other emblems of youthful bravado in their rooms. The stolen road sign, for instance, dates back at least a hundred years in Rutgers student culture. Females were more likely to mount evidence of artistic tastes and of continuing childlike qualities. Stuffed-animal collections were much more common with "girls" than with "guys." One young man on Hasbrouck Fourth did have a single teddy bear on display, usually sitting in the middle of his neatly made bed. He also lifted weights, however, and he

was careful to explain to the interested visitor that the teddy bear was a gift from his girlfriend.

Some residents put only a little effort into the personalization of their rooms. My sophomore roommate Rich pledged a fraternity in 1984, and he was around on Hasbrouck Fourth so little all year long that he periodically had to ask *me* who was who and what was going on. His wall iconography consisted entirely of a large Mickey Mouse logo, a photo of a favorite sports car, and a poster of Ronald Reagan with a missile through his head. He had an excellent tape deck and a fine collection of contemporary popular music, however, which I enjoyed listening to with him late at night.

Carrie and Andrea, on the other hand, were known on the floor for their "interesting" room. Early in the fall, it combined daily clutter equal to that of the most stereotypically messy male rooms—open dresser drawers, clothing of every sort strewn on the floor, unmade beds—with intricate wall design. Though Carrie and Andrea had decorated different walls, the room looked coherent as a whole, like what it was, the single space shared by two good friends. One evening Carrie spent half an hour annotating one of her walls for me. Up and down its twelve-foot length were dozens of different emblems of her tastes in poetry and popular music, her regional origins in New Jersey, and her sexuality. It was hard to miss the enormous pharmaceutical poster advertising a birth control device directly over her bed or the "Who's for sex?" scrawled near the top. The wall also displayed cryptic references to local incidents that had already occurred on Hasbrouck Fourth, including a pair of panties hung up to spoof the "wedgie patrol" (see below), and references to the use of an illegal substance. Perhaps as interesting as what the wall did show was what it did not. You probably wouldn't have known from the wall alone that Carrie was black. But you would have known that she was proud of her punk identity.

The doors to the rooms almost always carried the erasable message boards by which the students kept track of their callers, and occasionally there were collages or other visual displays. But once across their thresholds, the personal imagery dropped abruptly away. Once out into the corridors, one moved into the semipublic area of the floor. And here the walls were all almost entirely unadorned: brick or cinder block on Hasbrouck Fourth, with a few half-tended bulletin boards, and thermostats that seemed to work on the placebo principle. There was a public phone booth

in the corridor on each side of the floor, and students in perhaps a third of the rooms quickly had their own private phones installed. A collection of utilitarian furniture squatted bleakly in each lounge: a formica table and plastic chairs, butcher-block easy chairs and a sofa chained together against theft. And more aluminum windows from which to look out onto the world.

The lounges and the corridors may have appeared impersonal, but in the tacit social conventions among the undergraduates, they were only semipublic spaces. If, as a stranger, you walked confidently through or directly to a private room, no one would challenge your presence on the floor. But if you hung around uncertainly or sat down in one of the lounges, a resident would usually ask you who you were and what you wanted within a few minutes. The lounges and the corridors were spaces for friendly behavior between known floor residents. Much of the more amiable fooling around on the floor occurred in them: wrestling between friends of either sex, golf and floor football among some males on Hasbrouck Fourth—the latter played on hands and knees, with a foam rubber ball—and endless talk.

Hasbrouck Fourth, like other floors in Rutgers dorms of this design, was divided into two sections, each with fourteen rooms, one lounge, and one big bathroom. Like virtually all Americans, according to almost all sociometric research, Rutgers dorm residents tended to make their best friends from among those persons closest to them in space. So you were more likely to know and to be friends with the residents of your own section than with those of the other side of the floor. But this was only a tendency. There were many exceptions. Two things encouraged friendliness and real friendships across the sections: the preceptorial system, expressly designed to foster floor community through common floor meetings, programming, counseling, mediation, and so on; and—far earthier—the bathrooms. In any semester, one of the two bathrooms on the floor was for women only and the other was for men, with a reversal of assignments the following semester. Thus you met people from the opposite section every day under very intimate circumstances, either walking past the opposite lounge in your bathrobe or being walked past, or, with same-sex persons, dishabille in the showers or around the washbasins in the bathrooms.

The bathrooms (three toilets, three urinals, five washbasins, and four showers) were the least-pleasant areas on the floor, often smelly and dirty, especially after liquor-laden weekends. Professional janitors did their best to keep them clean. They were the only adults who were around the floor

on a daily basis. In the 1980s, they were usually working-class Latin women and men who lived in the slums of downtown New Brunswick.¹³

OPENING SCENES

The preceptor, Pete, raised the curtain on Hasbrouck Fourth with the first floor meeting of the year, held on a Wednesday evening in early September. Pete made a series of announcements, and, sounding a demented basso profundo, Dan's clique and a few of the other returning sophomore men busted on him, loudly and incessantly, all through the meeting. With the new residents as an audience, they were clearly laying claim to their old friendly male connections with Pete, established the year before:

Visiting Residence Counselor: Pete is a great preceptor. I know him from last year. I guarantee you, if you help him out, you'll have a great floor this year. If you help him, Pete, Pete will do *anything* for you.

Sophomores: Yeah, especially you *girls!* You do anything for Pete, he won't forget you. Pete *loves* girls who do anything for him!

Pete took the sophomores' mockery in apparent good humor. But, along with his new, private ambivalence about his job, he had another problem, which was not his own doing. He had some bad news for his old friends, some new dorm regulations they were not going to like at all.

College Drinking

For a decade, liquor had flowed freely among American college students. The liberalization of the late 1960s had driven minimum drinking ages down all across the country. Rutgers was no exception; the college had even had its own student pub, the Rusty Screw, open to anyone eighteen years old or older. And in the dorms, the single most popular event by which the students had built their notion of floor "community" had been the floor party, usually thrown once a semester on every dorm floor for many guests—with beer kegs and highly potent punch and other liquor in the lounges. But now things were about to change drastically, back toward older pre-1960s college alcohol protocols outside the memory of modern students. For the state of New Jersey had raised the minimum drinking age back up to the age of twenty-one. And university officials had ruled that

liquor was now forbidden to underage drinkers—to about two-thirds of the undergraduates and to all but a few of the residents of the dormitories—anywhere “in public” in the college.

Still respecting more recent understandings about the demise of *in loco parentis*, the officials had declared that whatever the students did behind the closed doors of their own private dorm rooms was their own business. “In public,” however, explicitly included those parts of the dorm that the students tended to think of as their own collective private spaces, the corridors and lounges of the dorm floors. Pete explained this very clearly as he announced the new policies in the first meeting, to catcalls and hoots of contempt from the sophomores. “They” really meant it this time, Pete said. He would *have* to write up any residents he caught even walking from one dorm room to another with open beers in their hands; he would have to report them to higher authorities for possible disciplinary action. There were also imprecise guidelines about the point at which a few friends in a dorm room turned into a more public, more illegal party, he tried to explain—fifteen people to a room, or twenty-five, he was not really sure.¹⁴

Pete sounded angry about these announcements, and a grouchy tone that I had not heard from him before crept into his voice, almost as if he resented the Hasbrouck Fourth residents for making it necessary for him to enforce such dumb, unpopular rulings. The sophomores wondered how the deans expected them to make the floor a friendly place, on the one hand, while taking away their favorite collective activity on the other. Pete delivered the deans’ line in response—there were other things the residents could do together. They could have other kinds of parties (“How can you have a *party* without liquor?” some students asked in disbelief).¹⁵ They could hold interesting programs. Money was available for a bus trip to New York City. The sophomores were not convinced, however, and the first floor meeting of the year on Hasbrouck Fourth ended in cacophony.

The sophomores apparently took Pete at his word about the toughness of the new drinking regulations, but they also immediately began scheming about ways to circumvent them. The very next evening, some ex-residents of Hasbrouck Fourth from the year before—a group of seniors with a big house on Henry Street, a half-mile from campus—threw a big off-campus party, a “three-kegger.” Dan and his friends saw to it that everyone from Hasbrouck Fourth was invited. Some of the new freshmen drank so much that they had to be helped back to the dorm afterward, the sophomores reported contentedly later. Many students also drank all the

harder in their rooms. Perhaps a dozen had little refrigerators for cold beer, and there was at least one private bar among the students on the floor. Many of the men and some of the women possessed fake identification cards for use in public places and exchanged information about which off-campus bars were easiest which nights of the week. One evening I nursed a beer at a favorite college hangout and had the genuine pleasure of being “carded” myself, at the age of forty-one, while four underage friends put away drinks with names like Zombie and Red Death and Kamikaze.

And two months later, in early November, after extensive planning, Dan and Louie and Chris collaborated on a *de facto* floor party one Thursday evening when they had determined that Pete would be out. They emptied Dan’s room entirely of furniture and equipped it with a bar, a stereo, and two kegs of beer. They established Louie and Chris’s room as a quiet room for talk and for extra guests, and the girls next door donated their room for even more intimate pleasures. They invited a dozen select guests to come early, to warm up on “[Bloody] Marys.” And they invited over ninety guests to come later on, counting on them to show up at different hours and to move in and out of the drinking-and-dancing room so that it would never have more than about thirty people in it at any one time. They kept an eye on its door and monitored the noise level. No one got written up. Dan, Louie, and Chris were very pleased with themselves for several weeks after the party.

Hazing: The Wedgie Patrol

The new liquor regulations provided the first dramatic tension on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984, early plot complications inflicted upon the floor by higher authorities. The next challenge to the floor’s equanimity, however, came from within. I had only lived on Hasbrouck Fourth for a few days when I began to hear rumors of activities that reminded me of some of the cruder customs in older American undergraduate culture. I had thought such things had entirely died out or had been suppressed by the deans. And, in fact, I never heard any stories of similar carryings-on anywhere else in the college in the 1980s. Something called the “wedgie patrol” was abroad in the late hours of the night on Hasbrouck Fourth, I was told.

Soon I heard a lot more,¹⁶ and one day I was directed to a display of ritual objects: five or six pairs of torn white men’s underwear tacked up on

Dan's door. The perpetrators, once again, were the rowdiest of the returning sophomore males, Dan and his friends. At two or three in the morning, when most of the night owls on the floor had finally gone to sleep, the marauders insinuated their way into the rooms of other males on the floor ("Jay, there's a phone call for you out here . . ."). New male students and unpopular older ones were snatched from their beds, usually sleeping only in their underwear,¹⁷ and "hoisted" by the tops of their "wares" until the garments shredded, leaving them naked and confused, sometimes with cloth burns on intimate parts of their anatomy, at the center of a circle of laughing attackers. In vulgar male talk among the students of the 1980s, to "bust someone's balls" was usually metaphoric: to make verbal fun of them in an aggressive way. The wedgie as an action collapsed the metaphor, making the phrase very literal indeed.

The correct manly response to a wedgie attack, according to its perpetrators, was to take it in good humor. The patrol had started the previous year, some of the sophomores said, when Hasbrouck Fourth had had lots of freshmen men on it. It had been initiated by a junior clique on the floor, guys all from the same New Jersey hometown who had stuck together for three years at Rutgers. They were still together in 1984. They were the "Henry Street guys," the hosts of the off-campus party above. Last year's juniors had wedgied last year's freshmen, and then each freshman victim had happily joined the patrol, its aficionados claimed. "Last year, the patrol brought us all together!" This year, in 1984, the old freshmen, now returning sophomores, were seeking to make the patrol into a tradition on Hasbrouck Fourth. They were, of course, also following the old principle of asymmetric reciprocity in undergraduate hazing: What was done to me last year I get to do to someone else this year.

The patrol was not popular on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984, however. For one thing, the demographics of the floor were very different; there were only five freshmen males on it in 1984. ("We would *never* wedgie a girl!" one sophomore said in shocked response to an anthropological query about the fundamental rules of the game.) And the first two freshmen men the patrol attacked did not enjoy the experience at all. One was Howie, a pleasant, nervous young man who had expected "more academic types like me" at Rutgers than he found. The second was Tim's freshman roommate Leo. Leo appeared to be an ordinary fun-loving New Jersey adolescent, and he did love drinking and partying. He was actually Argentinean, but without a detectable accent because he had come to the United States at the age of ten. His early Latin American socialization

might not have prepared him for collegiate assaults on his genitals; he was, in any case, extremely angry about his nighttime wedgie attack. He made it very clear that he had no desire whatsoever to join the patrol, and he tried to find a new roommate for a week or two until the patrol cooled off and left him alone.

Other members of Hasbrouck Fourth also profoundly disapproved of the patrol in 1984. Its activities, which had apparently originated in early-adolescent male locker-room culture, were "high school stuff" in the opinions of most of the residents of the floor. Carrie really wanted to be friends with Tim, but she simply couldn't, she said, for in his heart all Tim really was was the "wedgiemaster." Which was a fundamentally stupid thing to be, Carrie thought. Art, Jim, and Harry thought that the patrol was equally dumb.

Other stories began to be told about Hasbrouck Fourth the year before. The wedgie patrol had been a favorite activity on the high side that year, according to Chris. (Room assignments had been different the previous year.) "They were like a fraternity over there last year," Chris added. He and Louie had lived on the low side, "where we were more individualistic." Chris and Louie were not close friends with Dan and his friends in 1984, in part because of their disapproval of the patrol originating from the previous year. "They're really a bunch of bozos," Louie declared, "not that I don't get along with them or anything." Ditto, in the opinion of Gary and his roommates; ditto, in the opinion of Jay. George, one of the patrollers in 1984, inadvertently confirmed these stories of floor conflict the previous year. One night last year, he said, a very big, muscular junior male from the other side had, for some reason, "gone berserk" and tried to beat down George's door, shouting, "No more of this patrol *bullshit!*"—while George and one of his friends had cowered inside in fear.

In 1984, Dan and his friends declared that the other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth were not going to "bully" them into giving up their nocturnal fun. But they took the patrol elsewhere (down to the third floor, where there happened to be many more freshmen men in 1984), and by mid-October the patrol had died out as a visible activity on Hasbrouck Fourth, apparently killed off by the collective disapproval of most of the residents of the floor. Though I did not notice it at the time, however, the preceptor, Pete, was oddly absent from all the stories—old ones and new ones alike—that were told about the wedgie patrol on Hasbrouck Fourth.

INTERLUDE

Despite these early conflicts, daily routines and ordinary sociability became established among the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth in the first two months of 1984 much as they had on other college dorm floors in other years. The sophomore males tried to teach the freshmen the underside of college life by telling them stories of the wild and crazy things they had done the year before. They had stolen Pete's stereo after he lectured them all on the importance of locking up and then walked out of his own room leaving the door unlocked; they had thrown flaming paper airplanes off the roof; they had carried out some particularly legendary Secret Santa stunts (see below). Early this year, they had lugged a drunken, passed-out friend in his underwear into one of the two elevators in the dorm, to go up and down all night grossing out the other dorm residents.¹⁸ The sophomores also passed on a few pieces of nonsensical student folklore. "Do you know that if your roommate commits suicide, the deans have to give you 4.0 [a straight A average] that semester?"

Occasionally a few upperclassmen engaged in a little light, ad hoc hazing. Irritated by a loud, especially naive freshman, Gary and his roommates invited him into their room one evening for a few glasses of the fruit punch they had mixed up. They warned him with a wink to watch out for it. After he rapidly began to show signs of intoxication, they told him, and everyone else on the floor for a few days, that it had contained nothing but fruit juice and club soda. He quieted down for a few weeks.

Floor Friendliness

Most of the freshmen on Hasbrouck Fourth, interviewed privately in the first weeks of the semester, said they were impressed and relieved by the general friendliness of the other students on the floor, especially of the knowledgeable upperclassmen. They were grateful for the chance to establish personal relationships so quickly in college, particularly given the size, impersonality, and confusion of most of Rutgers outside the dorms. A few of them also said, however, that the ambience of the dorms was more juvenile than they had expected in college, and a few others were surprised at how little studying some of their upperclass exemplars appeared to do. Half a dozen freshmen said they were particularly surprised at the amount of drinking that went on.

The sophomores and some of the other upperclassmen also set examples for the sensible use of daily and weekly time for the freshmen. Avoid classes before eleven or so in the morning. Look for floor friends for lunches and dinners; nap in the afternoon if a morning schedule was absolutely necessary; spend some friendly time in the lounge every day, especially before an early dinner (around four in the afternoon) and after an evening of studying. To bed at one or two in the morning after quieter talks with closer friends, or perhaps after a little "David Letterman" or some other late-night TV comic. Avoid Friday classes. Thursday nights were the big party nights; then home or somewhere else for the long weekend, and back to campus Sunday afternoon, perhaps warming up for the next week with the first real studying of the weekend.

Not everyone followed these routines. They were only a kind of well-known average. And not all students oriented themselves to Hasbrouck Fourth as their main unit of college sociability. Sixteen of the sixty-two residents in 1984–1985 were not part of everyday society on the floor. About half of them were juniors and seniors, many of whom had special dispensation. "Who's that guy who lives in 401?" a freshman asked the sophomore Steve in October. "Oh, that's Eric," Steve explained: "He's a senior. He's a good guy. But he's very busy. He's on the campus fee board. That's an important position. He's also working his butt off on an honors thesis in economics. He's a hotshot. He's gonna get into Harvard law school." Other absentees were freshmen and sophomores with their commitments elsewhere—my fraternity roommate Rich, a girl with a boyfriend in another dorm, a kid from a nearby hometown who had never really made the break from home.

You were not a bad person if you did not hang out on the floor; you were just a nonperson. A much worse thing to be was a person who was around a lot but not friendly. Then you were in trouble. Then you were a snob. If you didn't watch it, you might open your door one day to find some local vigilantes "mooning" you in disapproval, or someone might fill a large garbage can with water, balance it against your door, knock, and disappear.¹⁹

Accordingly, most of the remaining forty-six residents of Hasbrouck Fourth spent varying amounts of time together in the fall of 1984 in the lounges, in private rooms, at Commons, going out visiting or partying with one another at night, going to classes together when they happened to have them in common, and so on. This was friendly time. You necessarily spent some of it with floor acquaintances you were not especially crazy

about as individuals, but you tried to spend more of it with your "real" friends on the floor.²⁰

The Discourse of the Dorm

In the lounges, the sophomores also soon taught the freshmen to talk the dominant mode of discourse in the undergraduate peer group. It might be labeled "Undergraduate Cynical." In different forms, it is probably a very old speech genre in American college culture.²¹ It can be seen as the polar opposite of Deanly Officialese, or of Faculty Lofty. Its attitudinal stance is "wise to the ways of the world." In it, moral, ethical, and intellectual positions are rapidly reduced to the earthiest possible motives of those who articulate them; in it, everyone who participates or is referred to is treated in the same way—leveled—made equal by the joke-and-insult-impregnated discourse of contemporary American friendly busting.

As the students spoke Undergraduate Cynical in the dorms, friends and acquaintances and one's own self were mocked at firsthand, and other people and other kinds of pretension were made fun of at a distance.²² The students might complain to one another about the rigors of higher education:

I really hate the teaching in my poly sci classes. They give you a lot of reading and lectures and then tell you to figure things out for yourself. There's a thousand questions the professor can ask. "Relate this to that." . . . I wish they'd have textbooks that just told you everything you need to know. Enough of this enlightened bullshit!—Freshman male, Erewhon Third, 1978

Or they might discuss among themselves various ways of beating the system, as did two upperclassmen on Hasbrouck Fourth in the spring of 1985.

Al: Hey, John, how was that exam? Was it a cake exam?²³

John: Yeah. The prof said up to five answers were correct for every question.

Al: Good, good. That means you can definitely argue points with him.²⁴

At first I mistook Undergraduate Cynical for a privileged form of truth, for what the undergraduates really thought among themselves when all their defenses were down. Eventually I realized that, as a code of spoken discourse, Undergraduate Cynical could be just as mandatory and just as

coercive as other forms of discourse. You could say some very important things in it, things that you really were not allowed to say elsewhere. It was definitely fun to talk it once you learned its rules, and I certainly enjoyed my regular bouts of it throughout my research. But you could not necessarily say everything that you really thought in it, any more than a dean speaking in public could easily stop emphasizing consensus and community among all those who "worked together" at Rutgers and suddenly start ventilating her or his personal animosities toward a particular administrative rival.

Imagine, for instance, that you were an undergraduate who had been reading a sonnet by the poet Shelley for a classroom assignment, and that it had really swept you away. Unless you enjoyed being a figure of fun, you would not have dared to articulate your feelings for the poem with any honesty in the average peer-group talk in the average dorm lounge. You might, on the other hand, have discussed such sentiments more privately with trusted friends. Ordinarily, the dorm lounge and its near-mandatory code did not allow you to say what the "real you" believed, either intellectually or in other ways. The dorm lounge was more often an arena for peer-group posing in which, acting friendly, you presented the "as if" you.²⁵

There were many nuances, subtleties, and variations in the modes of lounge talk, however. In unpredictable ways, peer-group talk could shift from purely cynical into more sincere, earnest expressions of meanings and feelings, even when it was not between close friends. In mid-September, while I was still getting to know the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth and while they were still sorting each other out, I touched off one of these talk sessions. In it, the student voices moved back and forth through a number of stances. Sometimes they were bullshitting. Sometimes they were simply being playful. Sometimes they were talking from the heart, evidently trying to present the "real me." Often they were trying to seize conversational control. And almost always, they were performing.

Louie had been hustling as usual, in an ironic mode he often used, simultaneously making fun of himself for hustling as he hustled: "Here I am, Mike, an unknown college sophomore, lost in the dorms at Rutgers. You're my big chance. You can make me famous. When are you gonna interview me? You *gotta* interview me!" So I decided to give him an interview I had been developing privately to elicit some simple cultural meanings. Except, as an experiment, I decided to give it to Louie around his peers rather than in private. We sat down with a tape recorder in a corner of the high-side lounge at about seven o'clock one evening early in the semester.

Fifteen feet away, Carrie was quietly reading a book and apparently minding her own business; two freshmen girls sat near her.

I led off with my standard opening question in this interview. I was a man from Mars, I told Louie. I understood about colleges educationally. Earthlings did not have preprogrammed knowledge like we did on Mars. But I did not understand about college "dorms" on Earth. Why did young Earthlings leave big comfortable homes a few miles away, where all their needs were provided for by their parents, and come to live in these crowded, noisy confines, packed together like sardines?

Louie: Well, part of college is to grow, and not only to grow intellectually but to grow independently. . . . When you come to college, it's not exactly the real world but it's one step towards it, it's kinda like a plateau. You become more independent. You have to do your own laundry. . . . And you feel a togetherness because there's sixty of you on the floor and all stuck in the same boat . . .²⁶

Louie went on in this vein for five minutes, answering a few of my Martian's follow-up questions. Then, possibly aware that Carrie and the freshmen women were listening in, he paused and soliloquized: "How I bullshit! You want some real answers now? I don't know why anyone's here. They're all just getting ripped off!"

This gave Carrie her opening. "Do you really believe all that stuff you just said, Louie?" she asked. Louie moved over closer to Carrie, and I followed him, carrying my tape recorder in a visible position. Louie said that he really did not know what he believed, so Carrie offered her answer to the Martian's question:

College is a place where suburban brats come, to hang out for four years. . . . I think it's a step *away* from the real world. . . . I don't think a lot of people here *want* an education, whether from college itself or from interacting with other people. . . . And when they get out of here, they're just going into Mom and Dad's business, or Mom and Dad is going to pay for their apartment for three years until they get a real job. . . . Which is really fucked up.

Louie recognized the critique, but he did not consider himself a spoiled college kid. He answered Carrie by telling her that his father was divorced from his mother and was not putting him through Rutgers; he had to work hard at several jobs to stay in school. He talked about how hard he worked

and how much money he made. A lot of other Rutgers undergraduates were serious, hardworking youths like him, he concluded. Carrie agreed that she was, but she was not sure about many others; and whatever the state of Louie's finances, she still thought his opinions were screwy: "I don't know, I see a lot of bullshit and a lot of bullshit people here. . . . And a lot of that stuff you were saying, I thought that was pretty *zorbo*. I said to myself, Louie man, if that's the way you think, I don't know . . ."

Louie challenged her to tell him what in the world was *not* bullshit? She made a case for the caring self, for "how you feel about yourself and how you feel about those closest to you. That's all that really matters." "I'm proud of myself," Louie replied, "so that's not bullshit, right? According to your definition?" Carrie agreed that it was good that Louie was proud of himself, but she thought Louie's pride was misplaced, since it was really just rooted in his ability to make money. And that, she said, still struck her as "zorbo bullshit."

At this point, one of the freshman listeners cut in. "What exactly is 'zorbo'?" she asked deferentially. "I've never heard the phrase." "Bullshit," Louie explained in a dismissive tone. "Nothing," Carrie added. Later I discovered that Louie had never heard the word either and was bluffing. Carrie had coined it the year before in an old clique on a different dorm floor. It was her synonym for "nerd." A real loser, she had decided for some private reason, a hopeless case, should have the name "Zorbo McBladeoff." Anything that such a character did was a "zorbo" thing to do. She was not able to sell the word to Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984, however; despite Louie's implication that it was a perfectly ordinary term in the talk of knowledgeable upperclassmen at Rutgers, I never heard it again.

Carrie and Louie went back to their argument. Carrie thought that the most important things in life had nothing to do with money. Finding something you really wanted to do was more important. So was helping and influencing others. "If you can do that for a friend, and one friend starts to think the way you do, that's two of you now, and if two of you can go out. . . . I want to be able to change the way America is. I'm serious! This place is so fucked up."

Louie replied that helping others often did you no good at all: "Like, if you believe in something, and every time you try to do it, nine times out of ten it gets pushed back in your face . . . Where does that get you? That and fifty cents and you can buy a cup of coffee." Right now, Louie decided, what *he* believed in was "*nothin'*." And he got bored easily, he said,

so he liked to try lots of different jobs and he liked to date lots of different girls. In deference to Carrie, Louie did not refer to his erotic prey with his normal label for them, "chicks."

While Carrie and Louie were in the middle of this colloquy, Jay walked in and sat down. He had been working on a paper for an English course; "Does anyone here understand Isaac Babel?" he asked the group at large. "No," Carrie answered abruptly, and went back to her argument. Jay did not like being ignored; he listened for a minute and then tried to change the mood of the session: "Oh, I get it, we're being cosmic!" Carrie told him to shut up, so he began busting on her directly. She had been talking about personal satisfaction through an artistic vocation. "Carrie wants to be a really incredible actress," Jay declared to the group, now augmented by three more passing residents, "perhaps on the order of Bo Derek or Ursula Andress." Carrie did not look much like either of these two ridiculous Nordic icons. That ploy did not succeed either, however, and a few minutes later Jay walked away.

Carrie and Louie went on arguing, and after another ten minutes, an upperclassman strode confidently into the lounge from the elevators. He was a skinny, self-assured young man wearing a worn black sports jacket; I had never seen him before on the floor, and I never saw him again. Carrie stopped talking and gave him a big hello, without introducing him to anyone else, and they alluded briefly to unexplained old intimacies:

Carrie: Heeey! It's you! It's the crazy man! What's up?

Stranger: So good to see you alive, kid.

Carrie: I know. I got through it.

Then Carrie went back to the meaning of life with Louie. The stranger listened for a few minutes, apparently felt he had caught the drift, and then stood up and actually danced around the lounge intoning the following paean to the self. He had a certain hypnotic charm, reinforced by the reiterative phrases he used, and a man-of-the-world authority reinforced by the density of his easy vulgarisms:

If you want to go out and be a success, you're gonna have to go to school and do well, you're gonna go to college, and you're gonna find out you can live on your own [Louie: "You're 150 per cent right!"] And you're gonna find out it's

you! You know that song [croons]: "It is yooooou, Oh yeah, Oh yeah"? [Back to normal voice] I can tell a person what's gone right for me, how I've gotten where I've gotten, how I've fucked up.

And that's all I can do. It's them, you know, it's got to come from them. . . . If they want to benefit, that's great. If they want to say, "You're an asshole," that's fine too. It hurts me to see them fuck up, but that's the way it's gonna be. And I don't get upset and say [tone of fake emotion], "You're fuckin' up, you're fuckin' up." I walk up calmly and say [calm tone], "You're fuckin' up." You know, "You could do it this way or you could do it that way." And it's gonna come from you. Nobody's gonna hand you anything.

That's the way I feel. You know, it's different for everyone, but that's the way I feel.

I was not sure what this tone poem had to do with the substance of Carrie and Louie's debate. But the stranger had captured everybody's attention, including my own. Everyone sat in rapt silence as he ended his spiel. Then, apparently deliberately, he punctured the mildly reverent mood he himself had created: "Yeah, and there's another thing. I don't like to *dog* anyone. I present myself, not *degrade* somebody else. And you know, it's rush week, everybody. And this is a lot of what my fraternity's all about . . ." The audience guffawed. The stranger laughed happily and made a quick exit. He had achieved what Jay had failed to do. He had popped the "cosmic" bubble. This little talk session was over, and the participants wandered off to other interests of the evening.²⁷

PLOT COMPLICATIONS

Meanwhile, however, the cast of characters who lived on Hasbrouck Fourth in the fall of 1984 went on writing and acting out its particular annual drama.

Friends and Enemies

By late October, the residents of the floor had connected themselves together in the complex network of friendship shown in part in figure 3.²⁸ A number of the larger friendship groups or cliques²⁹ in this network have been introduced already: Dan and his friends; Carrie, Andrea et al.; Louie, Chris, and the girls next door; the DUK brothers; Gary and his two tough

roommates. The remaining upperclassmen on the floor either belonged to smaller friendship dyads or triads with roommates or had their affiliations elsewhere.

Six of the twenty-one first-year students who had come onto the floor in September, including Howie and Leo, had formed their own friendship group. Most of the remaining freshmen floated between this clique and others on the floor. The three young women in the room next to my own, for instance, never did become close friends with one another, though they did get along all year long; each one made a separate set of friends of her own on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984, however.

One of them, Judy, was a tall blond who considered herself a "jock" and who soon joined the women's varsity track team. Judy said her mother believed she needed to lighten up in college and was very happy that she was living on a coed floor. In the middle of the year, she found a boyfriend who lived elsewhere. She became friends with Howie on Hasbrouck Fourth, through studying together, and with Leo. (Howie and Leo, in turn, shared the problem of having sophomore roommates and a common dislike for the wedgie patrollers on the floor.) Judy also made friends with Carrie; the two of them were the most assertive women on Hasbrouck Fourth. It was not easy for women to stand up to men on most coed dorm floors, as Judy and Carrie almost always did. Many more women residents let the males bust on them without really trying to even things up in return. "What can I do?" one freshman woman on Hasbrouck Fourth complained. "They're all so much bigger than I am; they'll *always* get me back twice as bad."

Judy's roommate Lisa made friends with Ernie and Alvin, two apparently easygoing black sophomores who lived across from her. Lisa also had a black hometown boyfriend; she herself was white. Pete had impressed me with his liberal political opinions at the beginning of the year, so he surprised me when I asked him about a few difficulties that Lisa seemed to be having with some other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth in the middle of the winter. "Well, society doesn't approve of what she's doing, you know," he replied. I honestly didn't know what he was talking about. Drugs? Lesbian propositions? "Her boyfriend," Pete explained. "Haven't you seen him? He's *black*. Not that I have anything against it. But lots of people do."

And Fran, the third roommate, also white, established a quiet, yearlong romance with Tim, the Japanese-American male in Hank's group, one of the two stable erotic "relationships" I knew of between opposite-sex residents of Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984-1985. Fran had struck me as un-

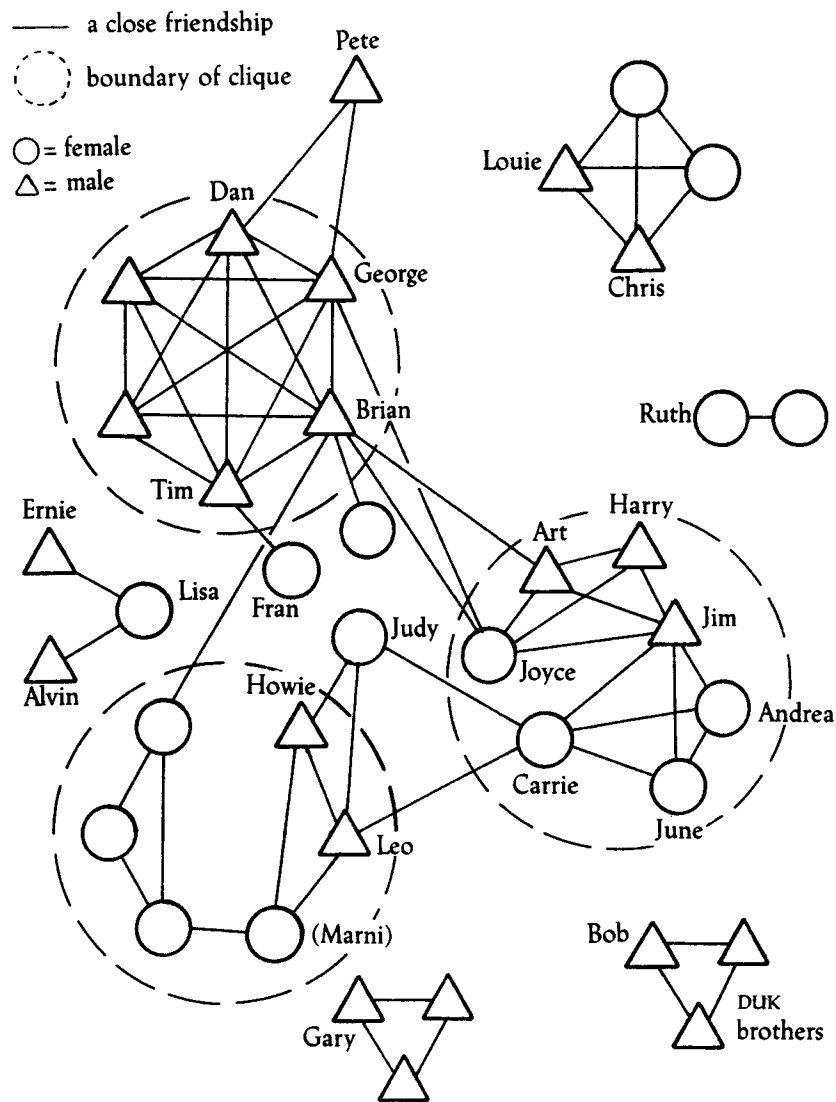


FIGURE 3 / Close Friendships, Hasbrouck Fourth, Fall 1984 (partial network)

usually conservative when I interviewed her at the beginning of the year; she herself admitted that she had a hard time with people who were "different" from herself. She seemed the least likely woman on the floor to have an Asian boyfriend, I told her at the end of the year. "Oh, but Tim," Fran proudly told me, "is more American than most Americans!"

The cliques on Hasbrouck Fourth did not determine all the friendships even of those students who belonged to them; virtually everyone had friends elsewhere at Rutgers. And, as figure 3 suggests, a number of clique members had friends in other friendship groups and outside the cliques on Hasbrouck Fourth as well. Dan's roommate Brian was a notable example. Brian was one of the more studious residents on Hasbrouck Fourth. He worked as hard as Jay, at communication and English. "Ask Brian if he wants to go out and shoot a few hoops," his friends quipped, "and he says, 'Sorry, guys, I'm working on this paper that's due next February.'" Though Brian was a charter member of the wedgie patrol, he did not spend much time defending its shenanigans; he had a quieter personal manner than Dan and most of his other friends—he was mellower, a "nice guy." And by late October, Brian had established more reciprocated close friendships with a wider range of other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth than anyone else on the floor (not all of them are shown on figure 3).

Figure 3 also underrepresents the stated individual friendship sentiments on Hasbrouck Fourth. It is only a partial map, and two people are linked on it if and only if each one named the other, confidentially and in private, as a close friend. By the end of October, Hasbrouck Fourth residents actually named an average of 5.3 other residents as close friends and another 12.5 floor members as friends. About 70 percent of the close friendship choices were reciprocated with close friendship choices; most of the rest were reciprocated with "friend." And the total "close friend" plus "friend" choices, an average of 17.8 per student, meant that about 35 percent of the total possible personal relationships on the floor were marked with some sort of sentiment of friendship beyond simple social "friendliness." When one subtracted the 16 floor members who were not around enough to be chosen as friends, the percentage rose to about 45 percent of the total possible relationships on the floor.³⁰

But there were snakes in this Eden as well. By late October, certain students on Hasbrouck Fourth did not like one another very much, and they positively disliked one another in some cases. The dislikes were much fewer than the likes, an average of two per respondent, and they were

much more asymmetrically distributed. Two-thirds of the students said that they did not dislike or have a hard time getting along with any of their peers on the floor; the other third, on the other hand, disliked anywhere from a few other residents to a dozen per person. Similarly, about two-thirds of the students on Hasbrouck Fourth received no dislikes from their peers, while about a third did, again in numbers ranging up to about a dozen mentions for the most disliked people on the floor. Finally, dislikes, unlike likes, were only occasionally reciprocated. Only 15 percent of them were returned to sender.

Sometimes the students disliked one another for simple characterological flaws as they perceived them, for flaws of interactive style ("obnoxious," "superior," "snotty," "condescending," "rude," "loud," "inconsiderate") or of essence ("baby," "extremely immature," "phoney," "shallow," "too old for his age," "thinks he's God's gift," "male chauvinist," "dick-tease," "bitch," "asshole," "scumbag," "flaming faggot," "all-American fraternity boy"). Many of the dislikes focused on three Hasbrouck Fourth residents whom I thought of as the "floor pariahs," social isolates without any or many close friends on the floor to compensate them for their local unpopularity among other residents. All three were aware in one way or another of these sentiments on the part of their fellow students. Two of them sought their closest personal relationships elsewhere; the third ignored floor feelings, but answered the "close friends" section of his questionnaire in late October with the names of four other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth—after which he poignantly wrote, "These are the people I consider my close friends, whatever they may think of me."

Other dislikes were aimed at better-connected students, at members of the bigger cliques on the floor. Some of these antagonisms had simple origins in the history of Hasbrouck Fourth to date. The three members of the wedgie patrol who had most loudly defended the patrol's right to practice its hazing, for instance, were all paid back with multiple dislikes on the part of other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth in late October.

The general norm of floor friendliness, however, meant that many of these dislikes had to be masked. And on the whole, as of late October, Hasbrouck Fourth was much friendlier than it was unfriendly. The residents knew that like most dorm living groups they had lots of cliques among themselves, but they also knew that a number of friendships on the floor cut across these cliques. The residents had also dealt with the one major internal conflict on the floor to date, with the wedgie patrol, by

themselves, and Dan and his friends had not let themselves be entirely defined by these nocturnal missions. Four of them, for instance, had close friendships that reached outside their tight little men's group. Consequently, after two months of the academic year, most students on Hasbrouck Fourth rated it as "a friendly floor, where we all get along." But this collective rating was soon to change.

Preceptorial Problems

In late September, Pete organized one program for Hasbrouck Fourth, a bus trip to an ethnic fair in New York City. Subsequent accounts of the field trip focused more on the drinking the participants had managed to do in the clubs of the city than on the fair as a cultural event, however; and this program aside, Pete was true to his word as the fall semester progressed on Hasbrouck Fourth. He was very busy with his own affairs—with his lab research, with his student teaching, and with his girlfriend; he had very little time for his preceptorial duties.

The student teaching seemed to take the most out of him. Pete did it several afternoons a week all through the semester, dressing up more formally than the undergraduate norm, in a sports jacket and slacks. He apparently did not like his teenage pupils in the affluent nearby town to which he had been assigned; Pete himself was from a poorer urban background. He came back to the dorm with stories about how spoiled the high school students were, about how they all expected to go to fancy private colleges, about how many of them looked down on Rutgers. He sounded very old and sure of himself when he delivered these opinions, and a few students on Hasbrouck Fourth began to mutter among themselves that Pete was developing the same attitudes toward them that he had formed toward these high school students.

When he was around, that is. Much of the time he was not, and the Hasbrouck Fourth residents resented this as well. Preceptors have tough jobs, halfway between friendship and authority, and they manage them best by putting in many hours, by establishing relationships with members of all the different cliques on a floor, by knowing what is going on at any time, good or bad. Pete was not doing this on Hasbrouck Fourth in the fall of 1984.

In the middle of the fall semester, I became one of Pete's problems. Under most circumstances, I kept floor secrets to myself, but I slipped when it came to the wedgie patrol; I mentioned its existence to one of the

deans. And, not surprisingly, Pete's supervisor soon suggested to Pete that he do something about it—ironically, a week or two after the other residents on Hasbrouck Fourth had really finished it off for themselves (though it was still occasionally operating downstairs). Pete was furious with me, as he had every right to be, but instead of talking to me directly about my faux pas, he cut me off. He simply stopped talking to me. He did nothing directly about the patrol, according to one of its leaders, but he did go around on the floor telling a number of residents that I was a spy for the deans and that they should stop talking to me as well.

For a few months, Pete succeeded in damaging my reputation on the high side of Hasbrouck Fourth, where the residents didn't know me so well on a daily basis. On the low side, on the other hand, some of my student friends told Pete that he was crazy, and I detected no change in their generally open, friendly attitudes toward me. When I realized what I had done, I talked to Pete about it, trying to apologize for embarrassing him. But it was clear that he no longer trusted me and that nothing I could say would reassure him.

Later, some of the sophomores who had been on Hasbrouck Fourth the year before, some of the nonadmirers of the patrol, gave me their own explanation for the implacability of Pete's anger. Pete himself had been one of the rowdiest students on the second floor of Hasbrouck Hall two years before, they said, close buddies with the seniors now known as the "Henry Street guys" back when all of them were carefree sophomores together. Last year, when Pete had first become preceptor on Hasbrouck Fourth, his old clique had moved up to the floor as juniors and helped him out by supporting his programs. (Preceptors often have an easier time when they can enlist the support of a group of influential upperclassmen on their floors.) Pete, in exchange, had winked at the activities of last year's wedgie patrol. He had remained close friends with many of the students involved, and he had also made friends with some of the new freshmen males who had enjoyed being wedgied by the patrol in 1983, with Dan and his friends as freshmen.

Last year, I was told by these sophomores, Pete had been very "one-sided" in his treatment of Hasbrouck Fourth. He had always gone along with his junior and freshman friends. He had also run an exceptionally relaxed floor: "No one ever got written up for *anything* on Hasbrouck Fourth last year," I was told. This year, 1984, Pete had continued with his laissez-faire policies, though he was becoming less interested in sophomore juvenilities in their own right. Hence, perhaps, his anger at being

asked by the deans to do something about a hazing practice that he himself had twice failed to suppress.

Cracks in a Clique

There were cliques and there were cliques on Hasbrouck Fourth in fall 1984. Some—Dan and his friends—were totally “tight”; everyone in them chose everyone else as a close friend. Others were much looser. Howie and Leo’s freshman group, for instance, was linked together with some relationships of close friendship, but it was also missing many others. There was no reason for total closure, for among the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth as among other Americans, true friendships are fundamentally dyadic relationships. Someone else’s choices should not determine your own; friendship is not transitive. If I am close friends with both Chris and Brian, that doesn’t mean that Chris and Brian have to be close friends with one another. And there is no reason why people cannot hang around together without mutual close friendship among everyone involved. Cliques can tolerate a certain amount of personal indifference; what they cannot ordinarily tolerate is real hostility between two or more of their members. And in late October, I noticed that Carrie and Andrea’s group contained one such two-way dislike.

Carrie and Andrea’s clique was, in fact, almost two different groups. The clique held together only because everyone in it had a close friendship with Jim. But it also contained a tension, between Carrie and Art. Carrie could be a real toughie, that was clear. And Art, despite all the “outrageous” routines he enjoyed performing, clearly had his own limits as a white male. In late September, I watched him fail to amuse his friends with an impromptu skit in which he tried to make fun of all the TV shows with the theme, A woman makes it in a man’s world. It could have been a good routine, but its audience couldn’t quite follow Art’s intent. “I don’t get it,” Jim asked. “Are you making fun of the shows or of the women?” On another occasion, Art succeeded in amusing a small, all-white group in the low-side lounge with his parody of a black student with a ghetto accent hustling whites in late-sixties language. As he performed this routine, Art looked around furtively, apparently to make sure none of the black residents of Hasbrouck Fourth was within earshot.

Carrie and Andrea’s clique soon contained another complication as well. Andrea was a flirtatious young woman at the beginning of the year, given to scanty dress and a certain amount of erotic display around the

dorm floor. She and Carrie apparently enjoyed being mildly outrageous, and there were rumors that both of them were “wild” outside of Hasbrouck Hall. Sometime in October or early November, according to Art’s account, Andrea and Art had a brief fling, a “one-nighter.” But once was apparently enough as far as Andrea was concerned. She transferred her affections to Art’s roommate Jim, and they actually began to develop a real romance. Art was furious. The affair would never last, he predicted. Andrea was much too wild. She was also much too good-looking, Art said; she could get almost any man she wanted, whereas Jim was just a pleasant, ordinary-looking guy. He was not in her league at all, Art maintained.

Art was not quite ready to break out of this clique on Hasbrouck Fourth at this point, though he did start making friends with Dan, whose theatricality he admired. But by the last month of the semester, Art was a human pressure cooker. He was quietly furious with Andrea; he had always had trouble with Carrie; and now one of his male buddies had betrayed him. Andrea, who was evidently really beginning to care for Jim, was also beginning to change her public personality on the floor. She dressed and acted more modestly; she stopped her open flirting. She and Jim spent more of their free time privately with one another and less with the clique as a whole. Carrie must have been bugged about the new relationship as well, although she claimed that she was not. But she and Andrea could no longer be partying buddies together.

CLIMAX

The degree of tension that existed on Hasbrouck Fourth by the late fall was not in fact especially abnormal by the standards of the Rutgers dorms. In the absence of further plot complications, the floor members might have gotten along relatively happily with one another for the rest of the academic year. But Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985 was not to be so lucky.

Pete’s Tantrum

In late November, Pete called the second floor-meeting of the fall semester on Hasbrouck Fourth, the first one he had scheduled since early September. He was fighting a bad cold and seemed to be in a nasty mood in general. The floor had to plan its annual Christmas party, Pete said, to be held at the end of the fall semester. Nobody was very interested in the party;

the residents were still skeptical about such affairs in the absence of alcohol. Someone suggested that its theme be Dead Rock-and-Roll Stars; you could dress up as your favorite and come. Pete rejected this macabre suggestion out of hand and decided that it would be a toga party, if anyone cared. He indicated that he was not pleased with the apathy on Hasbrouck Fourth, and he went on to his second piece of business. There was a strict new policy coming out of the deans' office about Secret Santa, he announced.

I had heard rumors about Secret Santa since my first yearlong stay in the dorms, on Erewhon Third in 1978. It sounded harmless—too innocent, in fact, for the enthusiasm it seemed to generate among the students; undergraduates went on talking about Secret Santa for months and even for years afterward. By random ballots, the women and the men on every coed dorm floor paired off in the last week before exams in early December. I might have a female Secret Santa on Hasbrouck Fourth whose identity I did not know, and be a Secret Santa to a separate female who did not know my identity. Then we all sneaked around all week long leaving amusing little presents for each other. And then, at the Christmas party, we revealed our identities and gave one another one more big gift.

It was Pete who clarified for me the real appeal of Secret Santa, back in September when we were still friends. To get each gift, he explained, you had to meet a challenge; you had to perform an embarrassing stunt, sometimes in public outside the dorm, more often in informal performance sessions held in front of your floor friends in one of the lounges two or three evenings during the Secret Santa week. Pete had made a scrapbook of his own photos of floor fun on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1983–1984. More than half the photos showed last year's Secret Santa performances. Transvestite males. Nearly nude females and males. Other outlandish costumes and carryings-on. Mardi Gras! Carnival!

But no longer, Pete informed the Hasbrouck Fourth residents in late November, for the deans' office had decided that Secret Santa had gotten out of hand. During the week of Secret Santa, students, faculty, staff, and adult guests of the college never knew when they would suddenly be exposed to shocking Secret Santa performances in public—stripteases, female impersonators, and other unsavory sights. Some students had also been psychologically damaged, the deans claimed, by the things they had been bullied into doing by the peer pressure of the dorm-floor group. There had been many complaints. It would all just have to stop, the deans declared. From now on, the emphasis was to return to the “nice, spirit-of-

the-season” aspects of Secret Santa (the presents), one written announcement read. No students were to “humiliate themselves” in order to get gifts; no students were to act in “derogatory” ways or to say or sing “offensive” things; no “bizarre” clothing was allowed. Anyone ignoring these new edicts might be in violation of the university policies against hazing.

The residents of Hasbrouck Fourth booed when they heard this announcement. They hadn't liked the new antidrinking regulations in September, but at least that crackdown had been based on state law. What harm was anyone doing to anyone else with the fun of Secret Santa? And what business was it of the deans, anyway? The Secret Santa challenges were not really hazing, some students claimed. Hazing was a one-way practice between unequals—sophomores and freshmen, fraternity brothers and pledges—while Secret Santa challenges were perfectly egalitarian and reciprocal. All the participants in Secret Santa had to make fools of themselves. Nor did most of the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth believe that many of their peers had been damaged by their Secret Santa performances. Most people seemed to enjoy performing them; almost everyone loved cooking them up for others. And those who did not could always refuse to play the game on a particular floor. Or they could, and did, refuse and renegotiate particular challenges. Students who couldn't handle Secret Santa, one upperclassman said, were probably in trouble in their dorm-floor groups in any case. I tended to agree with him. The dynamics of Secret Santa, it seemed to me, were precisely identical to—were virtually a ritual map of—the dynamics of the student dorm-floor groups who practiced them.

Pete agreed that the new regulations were stupid. He also agreed that the deans' countersuggestions for “acceptable Secret Santa” activities were stupid:

Secret Santa does one good deed a day for the elf. This involves everything from picking up their mail for the day to making their bed. . . . The most the Secret Santa does is send the elf on little treasure hunts to find the gift . . . [or request them to sing] a Christmas Carol.—Memorandum to staff, Office of Residence Life, November 15, 1984

But the deans were as serious about this as they had been about the new drinking regulations, Pete said, and therefore the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth would just have to *forget* about Secret Santa this year.

The residents at the meeting continued to complain about the inappropriateness of the deans' latest ukase, however, whereupon Pete threw a tantrum. Hasbrouck Fourth was *such* a bad floor. People tore down his signs. (Some early anti-Secret Santa announcements on the floor had been vandalized.) No one helped with anything. This was *it* as far as Pete was concerned! Next semester he was going to do the absolute minimum around Hasbrouck Fourth! After the meeting several residents sardonically wondered how this would differ from Pete's preceptorial policy toward the floor during most of the fall semester. And Pete brought the meeting to a close by angrily stomping back into his single room next to the lounge and slamming the door behind him.

Secret Santa

The next evening, about a dozen residents got together for what they later referred to as an "informal floor-meeting." The situation was really getting out of hand on Hasbrouck Fourth, they agreed, and Secret Santa *did* bring people together. If everyone participated in Secret Santa at the end of the fall semester, when tempers were thin and residents had stopped making the effort to get along with one another, its fun often rejuvenated a dorm-floor group. Secret Santa worked off tensions and revived the friendliness of a floor collectivity; people went home for the holidays, missed one another a little, and then got along much better when they returned to the dorms in late January. Listening to the students' reasoning, I thought to myself that they were spontaneously recreating most of the arguments that functionalist social scientists had applied to ritual in primitive tribes in the early twentieth century. Secret Santa apparently *was*, in anthropological terms, an orthodox, do-it-yourself ritual of integration for an intense face-to-face community.³¹

A little integration was just what Hasbrouck Fourth needed at the moment, the students decided among themselves. There were rumors on other floors that other preceptors had handled the new Secret Santa regulations more sensibly than Pete had. They had told their residents to go ahead and have their fun, but to restrict their performances to the floor and to talk about them only among themselves. One preceptor in Hasbrouck Hall had even instituted a little ad hoc Secret Santa committee—herself, a high-side person, and a low-side person—to which residents might come for the appeal of any challenges they did not like.

Therefore, since Pete had effectively abdicated his responsibilities to the floor, Carrie and Andrea volunteered to try to organize Secret Santa themselves on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984. They went around with a sign-up list, and about thirty-five residents wanted to play. The next week when I arrived for my research, the floor had a buzz of collective excitement on it unlike the tired, slightly cranky mood that had become common by the end of November. Upperclassmen were telling stories to the freshmen of some of last year's wilder stunts.³² Males and females were talking among themselves about how they would deal with the challenge they had just received and what they would stick their cross-sex partners with next. It was not hard to "get" anyone of the opposite sex on the floor if you wanted to, or at least to try to get them. Secret Santa identities were well-kept secrets between the sexes, but within each sex, everyone soon knew who everyone else had as their Secret Santa victim. If I was mad at Joyce, for instance, I could easily find out that Bob was her Secret Santa and suggest something especially diabolical to him.

Early in the evening on the first Wednesday in December, the Secret Santa performances began on Hasbrouck Fourth. A pretty freshman woman who had rebuffed the advances of some of the men in Dan's group early in the semester had to go around dressed as a little girl, sucking on a lollipop, knocking on doors and asking people, in a fake-innocent tone, "What is sex?" Lisa, known for her sloppiness, was required to dress up and clean the windows and empty the wastebaskets in every low-side room. Leo, who was good-looking and a little shy, had to parade while wearing a tight black leotard from the waist down and nothing from the waist up, in the manner of the sexy male waiters at Chippendale's, a popular local theme nightclub. And at 7:30, just when everyone was sitting in the lounges digesting their dinners, another shy freshman, Howie, had to take a shower in the women's room while loudly singing "I'm a Virgin."

On the evidence of the Secret Santa stunts, the students were bluffing in their common, worldly claim that there was nothing emotionally difficult about living in sexually-integrated dormitories; they were engaging in a certain amount of perhaps necessary denial. A few of the Secret Santa stunts contained no sexual references: Lisa's above; and the stunt of a white freshman male who loved black break-dancing music, who had to dress up as a "heavy metal freak" and talk about the pleasures of his new musical tastes.³³ But more than four out of five of all the Secret Santa stunts I saw or heard about were sexually embarrassing in one way or an-

other. If the stunts were intended to work off the collective tensions that had developed after three months of close daily acquaintanceship on the coed dorm floor, sex was number one as the systematic source of these tensions.

Thus, students were required to say or sing or act out sexually inappropriate things in inappropriate places. They were required to administer sex questionnaires and bra surveys and jockstrap counts and kissing tests among their peers, and to report the results to everyone. Females and males had to appear in states of near-nudity. Secret Santa was sexually egalitarian in that it was not just the traditional male stare at the unclothed female body. Each sex got a chance to ogle the other. In perhaps a quarter of their stunts, men had to cross-dress. Male transvestism seemed to be funny to most of the students for its pure incongruity, not because it meant its victims were gay; real references to homosexuality were too insulting even for Secret Santa on most dorm floors. Female transvestism was rarely requested, on the other hand, perhaps because most women in the dorms tended to dress in a relatively masculine way most of the time: in jeans, pants, T-shirts, nonsexy blouses, and so on.

At ten o'clock that Wednesday evening, most of the Secret Santa participants congregated in the high-side lounge to watch and cheer and jeer one another's stunts. The main performance session had begun, with Pete conspicuously absent. Judy, the freshman jock, gave a weight-lifting demonstration in a very skimpy bikini, revealing a nice body and a well-developed set of muscles—which she made it clear she would use on anyone who gave her any crap. There was some male laughter, but it sounded like respectful laughter to me. Two of the DUK brothers had to have different parts of their bodies signed with each letter of "Secret Santa" according to the first letter of the body part in question (an *s* on their shins, for example) and then show each letter-and-body-part to the floor audience. Secret Santa ends in *a*. Everyone knew what was coming, the inevitable two-man moon. Joyce sunbathed in a tiny bikini, while Harry, dressed in an outlandish soft hat, a wild print shirt, and shorts, rubbed lotion on her back, making noises suggestive of near-orgasm.

Art knelt in front of a girl in the audience, looked soulfully into her eyes and recited the couplet:

Could it be you're the girl of my dreams?
Could you be the one to make me cream?³⁴

Whereupon Joyce sneaked up on him and covered him with shaving cream. Art looked surprised and a little tense, and later he came to me to ask me if I thought he had lost his cool. I told him I didn't think he had. Other people in his clique had been razzing him about his reaction, he complained.

There were six or seven other performances in this vein. The two most memorable ones were those of Bob, the third of the DUK brothers, and Andrea. In a number of ways, Bob had evidently been vying to be the most outrageous sophomore male on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984. His challengers were apparently attempting to neutralize him by telling him that he had to sing "The Twelve Days of Christmas" in the lounge wearing women's clothing. He did so, in a pretty pink dress, but he changed the words to the song just a little:

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me,
Twelve meals at Commons, eleven fake orgasms,
Ten kegs of beer, nine nights with Lois,³⁵
Eight nymph preceptors, seven high school bimbos,
Six girls alaying, five KUTs!³⁶
Four circumcisions, three sloppy blowjobs,
Two ribbed rubbers, and a bottle of Riunite!

And Andrea, perhaps due to her unusual sexuality on the floor earlier in the semester, was required to present a parody of the contraception workshops that college health professionals give in the dorms on a regular rotation. She did so with gusto. In preparation, she had gone to every male on Hasbrouck Fourth asking him to donate a sample condom. In her performance, she listed which males had given her which condoms, commenting on the sensuous properties of each one from a woman's point of view (what a ribbed rubber felt like, etc.); and then she led the women of the floor in a collective boo of all the males who did not have a condom, who "weren't prepared."

Then she asked her boyfriend, Jim, to come forward and stand in front of her, announcing that she was going to use him to demonstrate how to put a condom on. To increasingly nervous titters from the audience, she unbuckled his belt, unzipped his trousers, and unrolled the condom. Then she quickly pulled his underwear away from his waist and dropped the condom in, so that he was never *quite* exposed. Jim had been rehearsed; he

said, mock-dumb, "Gee, is that how you put one of those things on?" End of performance, to relieved cheers.

Everyone sat around for some time after the performances laughing and talking and evaluating their peers' acts. Then I realized that other people besides Pete were missing. The rowdiest of the sophomores, Dan and his friends, had not appeared. I was told this was purely accidental: you could only play a decent Secret Santa with an equal number of females and males; a smallish number of women had signed up, so Dan and his friends had agreed to sit Secret Santa out this year. This explanation sounded fishy to me, however: Dan and his friends, especially Dan, seemed the least likely members of Hasbrouck Fourth to willingly forego a chance to exhibit themselves in this way. Later I was told something that sounded much closer to the truth. Pete had caught wind of Carrie and Andrea's plans, so he had gone to his only remaining friends on Hasbrouck Fourth, to Dan and George in particular, and asked them please—for old times' sake—not to participate, and they had agreed. The next night all of them did show up, singing Jacques Brel songs in unison; Jacques Brel was Pete's favorite sentimental singer. But it was very odd to watch other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth acting out their vivid adolescent vulgarities while the former members of Hasbrouck Fourth's wedgie patrol belted out the songs of a middle-aged French singer.

The next night, a Thursday evening, Pete was also present. For it was the evening of Hasbrouck Fourth's Christmas party. Somehow the high-side lounge had been fixed up: there was a tree, decorations, and a dozen and a half Christmas stockings hung in the corner. Certain rooms were rumored to contain alcohol. It was possible that a decent Christmas floor party *would* eventuate on the floor after all. But before the party started, many of the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth had one last round of Secret Santa performances to act out. Pete announced that he would be watching them closely, and the stunts began as they had on the preceding night. A beefy sophomore male in a dress and bra did a surprisingly graceful dance of the veils; a freshman female stood up in a tight body stocking and told everyone what she liked best physically in men; one of the DUK brothers danced as a ballerina. A quiet Cuban male, who was going to explain why Latins made better lovers, waited in the wings. But Bob had the stage first.

Once again, his challengers had apparently tried to neutralize him with a relatively innocent challenge. He had played baseball in high school, so they had asked him to put on his old uniform and come out and reminisce. He did so for a few minutes, but then he smoothly segued into base-

ball jokes. He said they were one of the real pleasures of the game; he would like to tell a few, but they would only be funny if he applied them to people whom the residents knew, to the students on Hasbrouck Fourth. Most of the jokes were very crude and scurrilous. But, surrounded by everyone else from the floor, it was difficult not to laugh at some of them. "A grand slam": four of the best-looking women on Hasbrouck Fourth (Bob named them) "in your room with you all night." "Leading scorers": four of the most erotically inept persons on the floor, plus "Mike Moffatt." "A pickoff play: what two lovers with herpes do to each other." "A hit batter: what happens to any guy who makes a move on Judy."

Pete became visibly angrier and angrier as he listened to this routine. Finally Bob came to a joke that involved Penny, one of the less-popular students on Hasbrouck Fourth, a returning sophomore. Pete had devoted some time to counseling her the year before, he had told me in September; she was easy to irritate, and Bob in particular enjoyed irritating her. "That's it!" Pete shouted. Background music had been playing. Pete whipped the needle off the record and threw his second tantrum. Secret Santa was now officially over, he said. He was going to report Bob to the authorities for his stunt, and he would report anyone else who continued with their performances; the students could do what they wanted with their party. Ten minutes later, Pete stalked out of the dorm and spent the night somewhere else. Everyone else looked disgusted and deflated, and the party, not surprisingly, was a flop.

And so, in this dispirited mood, the curtain came down on the fourth floor of Hasbrouck Hall in the fall of 1984.

ANTICLIMAX

When the students returned to the dorms after the Christmas vacation in late January, many of them were happy to see particular friends on Hasbrouck Fourth again, but most of them had given up on the floor as a whole. This was no big deal, they implied. So what if not everyone got along on Hasbrouck Fourth? Since when did everyone get along on a dorm floor, anyway? So that if the preceptor was mad at everybody? Preceptors were not central to the happiness of most students. Maybe Hasbrouck Fourth *wasn't* a friendly place this year. One could always find one's pleasures elsewhere. "We may not have a friendly floor," one male in Dan's group observed, "but we sure do have a friendly corner!"

There had also been some changes in the composition of Hasbrouck Fourth by the beginning of the second semester. Louie, whom Chris considered his best friend, had transferred to a business college in New York City without mentioning his intentions to Chris. Chris had also had to deal with the sudden death of his father in the middle of the fall semester. He said that this move was "just like Louie" and that he did not hold it against him, but he seemed mildly disoriented to me for a month or two.

The two girls next door to Chris and Louie had had a third roommate, Laura, who was majoring in political science. She had struck me as an interesting young woman with more social conscience than the average Rutgers undergraduate. But she had quarreled with her roommates and with Louie and Chris during the fall semester, and she was gone before Christmas. Ernie had moved out because he could not get along with his roommate Alvin, and a white freshman male from the other side who could not get along with *his* upperclass roommate had moved over and matched up with Alvin. And his old room, next door to Pete's, now had a new black freshman in it, Dwayne, a funny, verbose young man whom the other residents soon nicknamed "the Freshman Kid." Carrie was rumored to disapprove of the way Dwayne played the black hipster and what she considered other stereotypically black roles around the predominantly white residents of Hasbrouck Fourth. "This floor's *very* strange," Dwayne commented with a certain relish a few weeks after he moved onto it. "Some people really hate each other here. It's got *everything*. It's even got a nasty preceptor!"

Art Blows his Cool

Carrie and Andrea were upset and discouraged by their inability to bring the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth together through Secret Santa in spite of Pete, and in spite of the difficult regulations inflicted on the students by the deans during the fall semester. But when they discussed it with one another at the end of the Christmas break, they disagreed about what to do next. Carrie was in favor of writing the floor off entirely; Andrea felt that they would just have to try to get along better with everyone else.

Contrary to Art's predictions, however, Andrea's romance with Jim was flourishing. They were definitely in love with each other, they both said privately. Andrea and Carrie said they were still friends, but they seemed to be drifting apart. Carrie was around on the floor much less, and their room became a rorschach of their disintegrating relationship. Carrie took

down her elaborate wall decorations, and the two of them shifted their beds and desks around so that the room now had two very distinct, separate studying-and-sleeping spaces in it. Andrea also continued to change her behavior on Hasbrouck Fourth; now she was just another nice, friendly, unassertive college girl. She and Jim might as well be married, Art observed darkly. Meanwhile, Art and Howie had decided that, as far as they were concerned, Jim was no longer their friend. This was news to Jim. And later in the spring, they quietly cut him out of their plans for the three of them to room together again the following year. Jim was hurt. "Well," Art said privately, "even friends get divorces occasionally."

But the hottest antagonism in their old clique continued to simmer between Art and Carrie. Late one night in early February, the two of them had an argument about the noise of Carrie's stereo, and Art complained to Pete. Carrie became very angry with Art for bringing the preceptor into the quarrel and told him, according to Art, that if he did not leave her alone, she "would get some friends of hers to take care of him." And the next afternoon, he heard her talking to her older sister on the phone in the corridor about her problems. "You can't let white folks push you around," Art said he had heard Carrie tell her sister. "You've got to kick their asses a few times to make them respect you." Art probably made a remark or two in return to Carrie and then, he said, he came out into the lounge to try to cool off.³⁷

I happened to be sitting in the lounge at the time with Jim, Andrea, Gary, and a few other high-side residents. After a few minutes, Carrie walked angrily out of her room and confronted Art in front of all of us. This time her threat was more orthodox if equally unlikely: "Don't you *ever* complain to someone else about something I do again or I'll call the campus police!" Whereupon Art, who was a foot taller than Carrie, stood up and, towering over her, seemed to go impressively, quiveringly off his head. He screamed at her for what seemed like five minutes. The rest of us went into mild shock.

I sat there telling myself that anthropologists are not supposed to get involved; they are supposed to listen and watch as dispassionately as possible. Carrie held her ground. Gary, smaller than Art but well-muscled, stepped bravely between them and nudged Art away, gradually calming him down. Carrie retreated back to her room, and Pete burst out of his room and started yelling at everyone. And then, apparently realizing that this was more than the average foolishness in the lounge, he led Art into his room, asked Jim to join them, and kept them there for some time.

According to Jim later on, Pete did not want to know any details; he just lectured them both on how all this had to stop.

Out in the lounge, in the absence of the antagonists, the rest of us laughed nervously about the confrontation. "I've been reading this same sentence for ten minutes now," a freshman joked. Gary was congratulated for his heroics. He told Andrea that she and John had to talk to their roommates; she replied that they had very little influence over either of them any more. Over the course of the year so far, we had all watched Art work himself into some very convincing pseudoemotions during some of his comic performances, so we all speculated about how much of his rage was a put-on. One student thought that it was mostly acting—"some Springsteen, a little Scarface." I did not. But real or contrived, this uncharacteristically dramatic public display of intragroup hostility had been hard on all of us. When I tried to write up my notes an hour later, I discovered that my memory had not retained anything of what anyone had actually said, only the emotional tone and the moves the various actors had made."

A week later, Art told me that he himself had been shaken by his explosion and had gone home for a talk with his father, who reminded him of why he was in college. He was going to "play more roles" from now on, Art had decided—not let people get to him so much. He had also decided that he could be real friends with other men but he could not really trust women. Carrie, for her part, had almost nothing to do with anyone else on Hasbrouck Fourth from this point on in the year, apart from a few close women friends. "I should have stuck with my first impression of Art," she meditated later in the semester. "When I first met him, I *thought* he was a psycho." Carrie had also decided that she had had enough of dorm life: "I mean, in high school, you were with people like this eight hours a day, but then you got to go home at night. Here, it's all the time!"

As a result of this antagonism and of other shifting relationships on the floor, the friendship network on Hasbrouck Fourth had changed significantly by early April (see figure 4). Some friendships had been stable since the fall. The old wedgie patrol males, Dan and his friends, were still tight, and so were most of the people in Leo and Howie's freshman clique. Likewise most of the roommate groups. But the fission of Carrie and Andrea's clique was almost total, and its disintegration had sent ripples out into other friendship relationships on the floor.

Art and Howie were on their own now, and Art was also good friends with Dan and Brian. Joyce and June had also gone their own ways. Joyce

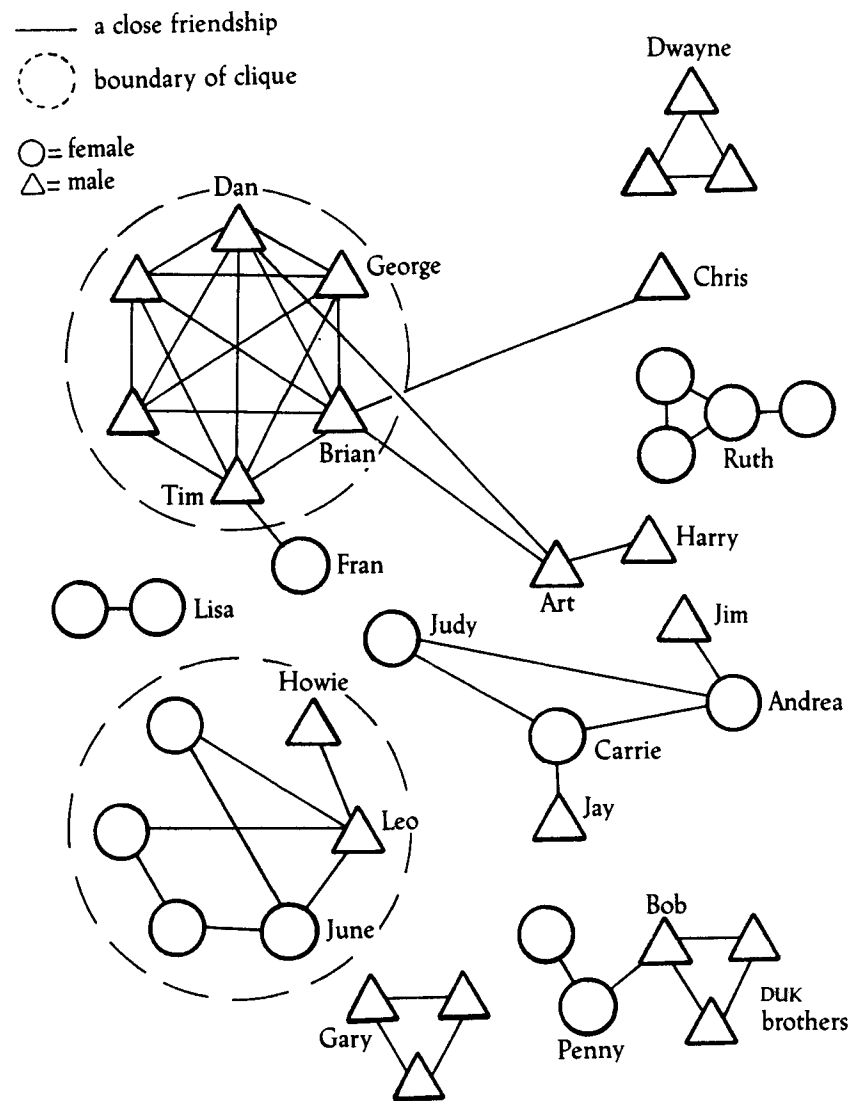


FIGURE 4 / Close Friendships, Hasbrouck Fourth, Spring 1985 (partial network)

was spending more time with her hometown boyfriend, and Harry was very angry with her for doing so—she had led him on, he felt. The freshman June had moved over and linked up with Howie and Leo's freshman clique (Marni, the girl she replaced in that clique, had moved out of Hasbrouck Fourth during Christmas break to live off-campus with her boyfriend). Jim had lost most of his old friends except for Andrea; and Andrea, Carrie, and Judy now had a small, three-woman clique of their own. Carrie had also extended to Jay the only reported close friendship that he was to have on Hasbrouck Fourth that year.

Elsewhere in the Hasbrouck Fourth network in the spring, Louie had disappeared and so had his little clique. Chris now had only one close friendship on the floor, with Brian. Brian in turn had become angry with the females he had considered his close friends in late October for considering him "just a nice guy." His close friends on Hasbrouck Fourth were now only men.⁹ On the high side, Dwayne had linked up with two upperclassmen down the hall. Perhaps the most surprising new friendship on Hasbrouck Fourth as a whole in spring of 1985, however, was between the obstreperous sophomore Bob and his Secret Santa victim Penny. This was also Penny's first real friendship on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985, apart from one with her roommate.

Pete Throws in the Towel

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the spring semester, Pete had carried out his threat and written up Bob for his Secret Santa infraction; the residence counselor downstairs was investigating the incident. It could be serious for Bob, for he had been written up once before, in the fall, for noisiness. Two infractions in one year and you were automatically out of housing, or so Bob understood his position. Bob defended himself by circulating a petition giving his view of the incident and asking that he not be evicted from the dorms for a little harmless fun. Thirty-nine residents of Hasbrouck Fourth signed it, including Penny. Penny herself told me that Bob had come by her room before his performance in December and warned her what was coming; she said she had taken his act in good humor.

According to rumor, Pete had attempted to resign as preceptor early in the semester but had been talked out of it by his supervisor. But he grew even unhappier with the floor, and possibly with his own senior year, as the spring semester progressed. He had not done as well on his senior hon-

ors research project as he had hoped; it looked like he was going to be a high school teacher instead of going to graduate school the following year. His girlfriend also contributed to his alienation from the floor. She was "very snotty" toward the residents in her weekly visits, in the opinion of others on the high side. They struck back by writing little things on Pete's message board when she was staying with him, such as "Do not disturb. Having sex." Dwayne took special pleasure in irritating both of them. He went around saying that he was working on his own research paper that semester. Its subject was Pete's girlfriend; its title was "Studies in Bimbology."

Sometime in February, word went around the floor that the residence life authorities had decided that Bob's Secret Santa performance was not a serious enough infraction to warrant throwing him off Hasbrouck Fourth. Pete stewed over the decision for a few weeks, and then, around spring break in mid-March, the residents heard that he had finally quit. And for three weeks Hasbrouck Fourth had no preceptor at all.

Life Goes On

The residents of Hasbrouck Fourth breathed a collective sigh of relief when Pete finally resigned. By now the floor was used to taking care of itself in any case; in the opinion of most of its residents, it did not really need a preceptor. These were the days during which many of the students on the high side told me about all the nasty things Pete had said about me months earlier. "But he was wrong about you," Gary concluded. "You stuck with us. Pete didn't."

I had in fact got myself in trouble with some of the deans for siding with the undergraduates when it came to Secret Santa. It had not struck me as a very lofty ritual; I had thought the deans had every right to push its performances out of public areas in the college, back onto the dorm floors. But after that, I thought, the authorities ought to leave the students alone with this particular simple pleasure. Secret Santa was ultimately more innocent, in my opinion, than many of the other things that the students did more privately. It had its own set of rules and conventions monitored by the dorm peer group.¹⁰ I had seen its positive functions within the dorm peer group. It had reminded me of some venerable western traditions of youth culture.¹¹ And Secret Santa was virtually the only collective event that the students inaugurated and carried out the way they wanted to in the dorms, other than parties, also restricted by

the deans in 1984. Aside from Secret Santa, purely student-initiated rituals no longer really existed in the individualistic undergraduate culture of late-twentieth-century Rutgers.

The deans were always saying that they wanted the students to develop initiative. They were therefore being hypocritical, I thought, in coming down so massively on *this* undergraduate initiative just because it violated their own sense of college seemliness. But the deans were not especially happy to have my opinion on this matter; like Pete, some of them became detectably less happy about me and about my presence in the dorms after I shared my views on Secret Santa with them, perhaps too frankly.

As spring blossomed all around Hasbrouck Hall, however, the thoughts of most of the young women and men in the residence halls turned to other things. Dan had taken a job as a night watchman for a month before the spring break, depressing his scanty studying time even further in order to save up money for a pilgrimage to the unofficial national student bacchanalia held every March in Fort Lauderdale. He flew down with one of his friends. Art and Harry scrounged the money to drive down, and they returned with stories of girls, endless parties, endless drinking, and their own "bizarrrity." Art, however, had not been able to leave Hasbrouck Fourth entirely behind him even in Florida. He had spent St. Patrick's day in some bar, he remembered later, talking to some stranger about his crazy dorm floor at Rutgers.

Later in the spring, to coincide with the two-day Springfest held in the college, Dan and his friends organized their own "Zekefest" on Hasbrouck Fourth, another private beer party in their rooms. George had a girlfriend, and Tim had linked up with Fran, but the other members of the clique had not done very well erotically in 1984-1985; privately, they were very "frustrated." What was a poor sophomore male to do? They sent out printed invitations for Zekefest to all the women they knew or knew of. Hardly any women came, but they claimed to have a good time anyway.

In the middle of April, an interracial coalition of student activists at Rutgers led a university-wide demonstration to encourage the Rutgers Board of Governors to divest the stocks the university held in companies with South African investments. It was the biggest political movement on the campus in years, drawing hundreds of people to its rallies, and an estimated fifteen hundred to a visit to the campus by the Reverend Jesse Jackson. A hundred or so students also camped out on the threshold of the

student center for two weeks, sleeping there overnight and more or less closing it down until exams started in early May. From Hasbrouck Fourth, Carrie was part of this demonstration. So, too, was Laura, the young woman who had been run off the floor by Louie and friends in the fall. Other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth visited the site of the demonstration sit-in from time to time, mostly to look and listen. Their opinions of the event varied widely. I did hear more political talk in the lounges than I had heard all year. Jay was a pragmatic liberal: the United States should support the freedom movement in South Africa, and it should get out of Central America, which was as bad, and as damaging to American national prestige, as Vietnam had been. Jim, who hoped to join the CIA after graduation, argued a more progovernment position. Some residents said that the leadership of the demonstration looked archaic to them: "Lots of late-sixties types, lots of graduate students, a few radical professors." And, speaking Undergraduate Cynical, many of them joked about the least idealistic motives for participating in the sleep-in. The spring weather was in a particularly beautiful phase; the sleep-in was a great way to meet girls or guys, many residents observed. As Judy put it, "A rally's an excuse for jumping up and down and hugging everyone you see and not feeling like a total dick for doing it."

Some people on Hasbrouck Fourth actually concentrated on their studies during the last month of the spring semester. Jay qualified for a summer program in England, where he hoped to study Shakespeare. Ruth continued to hit the books, and she graduated two years later as a Phi Beta Kappa. And Eric, the busy senior, continued to work as hard on his honors paper in economics as any graduate student I had ever seen during dissertation research. I spent over an hour with him one spring afternoon, listening to his woes and giving him what advice I could. He was doing impressive work for an undergraduate, and he soon heard that he had been accepted by the law schools of both Columbia and the University of Chicago for the following year, very good acceptances for a Rutgers graduate. He chose Chicago.

Almost everyone on Hasbrouck Fourth went through the one big trauma of the spring semester for most undergraduates: Where to Live Next Year. Even those residents who were lucky in the housing lottery would not have wanted to come back to Hasbrouck Fourth in the same numbers that they had done the previous spring. But Hasbrouck Fourth was not an op-

tion for the fall of 1985, for the dean of students, always trying to raise what he considered the deplorably low tenor of student life in dorms such as Hasbrouck, was reserving the floor for some new special-interest sections in the future.

In any case, many of the sophomores were ready for the greater challenges and freedoms of off-campus living. Dan would not be back at all. He had decided to pursue his real ambition in life; he was going to a drama school in New York City the following year. Most of his friends from Hasbrouck Fourth looked around for off-campus housing for the rest of the semester. I recommended a house I knew of on an "integrated" street in downtown New Brunswick. "Well, to tell you the truth, Mike," one of them told me, "most of us are 'mighty whites' and don't mix too well. Tim's *our* token." Eventually they settled, with a few other friends, two-to-a-room into a fancy new condominium a mile away. Art and Harry were also ready for an off-campus apartment and recruited the freshman Leo to join them.

Most Rutgers students who moved off-campus looked for single-sex housing. Apartments were a little too small and intimate for continued coed living. Andrea was not sure where she would live, nor was Jim. She had a chance to share with one other woman and two men, which she declined. According to Art, her mother did not want her to live with males—"which is ironic," Art added. Two years later, however, Jim and Andrea were still together, living in their own apartment in a neighboring town. My roommate Rich moved into his fraternity, and two of the DUK brothers moved into theirs. But Brian needed something cheaper than the dorms or off-campus housing, for his family, though straitened financially, did not quite qualify for financial aid. He might have to move back home and commute to Rutgers-Camden. With the help of the residence counselor in Hasbrouck Hall, however, he was chosen to be a preceptor—the job comes with a free single room and a small amount of money—and he went on to be a competent one in another dorm during his junior and senior years.

As the year drew to a close on Hasbrouck Fourth, some people on the floor grew nostalgic. Carrie and Andrea were looking at my photos from the fall one evening. "Oh, look at that one!" Carrie exclaimed. "Do you remember that evening, Andrea? That was the night we went off to hear Elton John in the city. Those were the days, weren't they?" Andrea agreed.

For the freshmen, Hasbrouck Fourth *had* been, as almost all dorm floors are for most freshmen, *the* central personal place for them at Rutgers.⁴² I asked all of them at the end of the year what person they had met during their first year at Rutgers—student, faculty member, or other—had impressed them most. A third of them mentioned one or another outstanding professor. The other two-thirds named other undergraduates, most of them other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth.

Ironically, though most floor residents had agreed since Christmas that Hasbrouck Fourth was no longer a friendly place, the total number of individual friendship sentiments on Hasbrouck Fourth toward the end of the year, in early April, was higher than that reported back in late October. The average student named about twenty-one other floor members either as close friends or friends in the spring, versus about eighteen in the fall. And the dislikes on Hasbrouck Fourth were slightly down as well, from 2.0 per resident in the fall to 1.6 in the spring. But the friendliness or the unfriendliness of an undergraduate collectivity is not calculated by adding up all the individual sentiments in the group; it is a matter of visible collective behavior. And after Pete's two tantrums, the failure of Secret Santa, and Art and Carrie's ongoing public quarrel, the floor had become too demonstrably *unfriendly* to reclaim its older, more harmonious self-evaluation.

In the middle of April, Ed, a junior from a lower floor of Hasbrouck Hall, moved up to Hasbrouck Fourth to finish out the year as its preceptor. Like Brian, Ed was also headed for a preceptorship the following year. Now he was getting a little emergency on-the-job training. Ed did not try to accomplish much on Hasbrouck Fourth in the last few weeks of the semester. He simply kept an eye on the floor for the residence counselor downstairs. His one official act was to conduct the last floor meeting in early May, featuring the annual Floor Awards Night, which took place on every dorm floor near the end of the year. Dorm residents seemed to enjoy this last little ceremony in the annual round of residence life. They voted for different floor members in the different categories on a mimeographed sheet circulated by the preceptor: "Best roommates," "Best looking," "Best dressed," "Studies hardest," and so on. What they enjoyed most, however, was dreaming up their own awards and writing them in on the ballots. The preceptor usually read out the write-ins and everyone had one last laugh together. The previous year on Hasbrouck Fourth, the write-ins had included "Most likely to blow off an hourly," "Floor air-

head,"⁴³ "Most corrupted," "Most likely to break things—sinks, tables, speed limits, hearts"; "Most likely to get fucked up";⁴⁴ and "Most likely to survive nuclear holocaust."

But Ed was a newcomer, and he was not at all sure what was going on, on Hasbrouck Fourth. Before the meeting, he had opened the ballots and blanched. "Most likely to drink her own menstrual flow"?! Busting is only safe if you are sure the people involved are friends or at least friendly, and Ed was taking no chances. He censored most of the write-ins, and awards night, the last collective event on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985, was accordingly a tepid event. At least it was not a disaster, like many of the group moments over which Pete had presided had been. My roommate Rich was "Floor Zombie" (he was never seen). I myself was "Most likely to pester people with questionnaires." And our year together on Hasbrouck Fourth had at last petered to an end.

THE REVIEWS

Hasbrouck Fourth was not a complete failure in 1984–1985. The students who lived on the floor seemed to have had their normal complements of college fun during the year—with one another, with smaller, more private friendship groups, and with their peers in other places. And some of the processes that took place on Hasbrouck Fourth were entirely normal as I knew them from other research in other dorms in the college. Friendliness and friendship making followed ordinary American adolescent protocols for the late twentieth century. As on other coed dorm floors, the students on Hasbrouck Fourth generally suppressed possible erotic emotions between female and male residents and settled friendly joking relationships. Lounge sociability followed ordinary undergraduate conventions, as did the modes of Undergraduate Cynical talk. And, as on other dorm floors where freshmen and upperclassmen lived together, the older students on Hasbrouck Fourth were the essential models for the first-year students when it came to the routine patterns of worldly undergraduate behavior in the college.⁴⁵

Yet by wide agreement among the residents of the floor, both at the time and as they looked back on it several years later, Hasbrouck Fourth was unusually idiosyncratic in 1984–1985, a considerably more conflict-ridden place than the average Rutgers dorm floor.⁴⁶ It is often possible to

learn more from situations of social stress than from normal ones, however. Fundamental cultural principles often rise to the surface in conflict and in agonistic behavior in ways that they do not during the flow of more ordinary social life. What were the probable reasons for the problems on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985?

The particular personality clashes on the floor might be dissected, but personal conflicts always existed among some of the sixty-odd residents of any dorm-floor group. And the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth had shown some real skill when it came to such things. Without any help from Pete, for instance, they had dealt with the wedgie patrol effectively, and some of them had tried to stitch the floor back together with their own Secret Santa around Christmas. Race might have played a small role in floor disension: Carrie and Art. Sexism was not absent: Carrie and Judy were entirely too assertive for females according to the ordinarily male-biased norms of the coed dorm. There was also sexuality as a point of tension: Andrea and Jim and Art, for instance. Social class even reared its head. Jay might have felt superior to other residents of Hasbrouck Fourth, somewhat beneath himself at Rutgers. And Pete had apparently had his lower-middle-class buttons pushed during the fall by his experience in an affluent, upper-middle-class high school.

But there were much more specific reasons than these for the problems on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985. I may have been one of them. I had acted badly on two occasions—in letting news of the wedgie patrol leak to the deans and, conversely, in taking the students' side versus the deans over Secret Santa. On both issues I should have tried to be more neutral. When it came to Pete's hair-trigger temper about being preceptor, perhaps I was the last straw. And yet, in my opinion, Hasbrouck Fourth would have had much the same history in 1984–1985 if I had not been there at all.⁴⁷ The floor's problems, at least in retrospect, seemed almost overdetermined by the curves the deans kept throwing at the students in 1984–1985 and by Pete.

From a certain point of view, the new nationwide restrictions on adolescent drinking, which began to take effect in the Rutgers dorms in September of 1984, made sense. By the early 1980s, alcohol use appeared to be almost out of control in American college-age populations, and the adolescent drunk-driving death rate was very high. Yet the students definitely did not agree with the new laws; or, more precisely, some of them did agree that many of their peers drank too much, but very few of them

felt it was fair or just to abridge their own freedom to drink. Drinking, of course, was not the only issue. Drinking was really about partying, and partying was really about sexuality. And sexuality was arguably at the heart of the pleasure-complex that was college life as the students understood it in the 1980s (see chapters 2, 5, and 6). Nevertheless, it is difficult to say what should have been done differently about the new liquor regulations in the dorms, other than to avoid the pretense that the residents of any dorm floor had any meaningful choices to make about local undergraduate standards for liquor use.

Secret Santa struck me as a more avoidable source of conflict. The cultural hiatus between the deans' and the students' sensibilities about having fun was so great, however, that the clash between them on this issue was less surprising than that so many students submitted to the deans' will so easily. For me, the deans' ability to suppress Secret Santa, for the most part, was a testament to the reality of their bureaucratized power when they chose to exercise it—and to a certain malleability on the part of the students. "Maybe some students *are* getting psychologically hurt by their Secret Santa performances," Andrea told me to my surprise a few months after the Secret Santa performances on Hasbrouck Fourth had become unglued. "After all, the deans say so, and *they* must know." Secret Santa, however, was not an issue any sensible modern undergraduate was ready to go to the barricades for. It was just one silly little pleasure of college life, most of the students seemed to feel. But if they could not play it the way they wanted to, they were not about to go back to the older, "innocent" form of the game that the deans recommended. They would just drop the whole thing. As most of them have done since.⁴⁸

As for Pete, whatever his personal reasons for his actions, his ultimate sin as preceptor on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985 was withdrawal.⁴⁹ There were many ways to be an acceptable preceptor in the dorms. The preceptor on Erehwon Third in 1978–1979—the floor described in the next chapter for other reasons—was a real minimalist. And he did not exactly fit the dean's image of the ideal upperclass role model. He was very open about having taken the preceptorship for its benefits, for the free single room and the pay, and he worked at his duties as little as possible. During orientation, when a few freshmen once asked him whether or not to attend the official events of the week, he advised them: "You want the truth? It's a lot of bullshit. Use the time to catch up on your sleep."

He came in spectacularly drunk several times during the fall semester, acted foolishly, and became violently sick. ("There's the *ralph*," he ex-

plained to a freshman girl the next day, "and then there's the *power ralph*."⁵⁰ He played pranks on some of the freshmen on the floor, rather than vice versa; and he briefed the freshmen males in detail about college traditions of minor vandalism as he knew them. And it was an open secret on the floor that he smoked pot occasionally. Yet when push came to shove on Erehwon Third in 1978–1979, when there was conflict and dissension—when there were possible racial problems on the floor about which the whole college was being informed—he was in there, doing his best. Which made all the difference.

On Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984, after late November, Pete was really not there any longer. And how could a floor whose central undergraduate personage was demonstrably *unfriendly* be a normal friendly place?

Further Comments

1 / One Italian exchange student at Rutgers told me that her college housing in Italy had been like this, just a place to live. And in her first month or two in the Rutgers dorm, she could not understand why everyone around her was always so "friendly." It all seemed very strange, she said.

2 / These deanly terms and quotes are all taken from the same pamphlet quoted in the epigraph to this chapter (Rutgers College n.d.), but they recur in many other written and oral sources.

3 / I do not mean to imply that the deans did not have their own more realistic perspectives as well; they weren't stupid. But American individualism is ideologically so coercive that they simply could not articulate them in official documents of the sort quoted

here, or at least these particular deans felt they could not. The deans also became very proficient at talking this language much of the time. For some of the reasons identified by George Orwell in "Politics and the English Language" (1946), *officialese* did, through its vagueness, serve the useful purpose of keeping them out of unnecessary trouble. One often had to know them well, in fact, to realize that deanly *officialese* did not totally, naively, define everything about the way they thought. One dean I knew at Rutgers once signaled his shift out of this opaque language into 'what is *really* going on', for instance, by warning me that he was about to do a little "low talk"—"and I better not find what I'm about to tell you, Michael, in your book!"

he added. (I *have* left out what he then told me.)

4 / See Di Leonardo 1984:131–139 and Varenne 1986b for two other meditations by anthropologists on the ambiguous ideological meanings of *community* in contemporary American culture.

5 / Like many other ethnographers, I am indebted to anthropologist Victor Turner for his concept of the “social drama,” which he first formulated in 1957. I would like to apply the drama metaphor a little more tentatively here than he did originally, however. Social life, Turner suggested, was not the smooth acting-out of a predetermined cultural script, but a constant struggle between self-interested actors, its outcome always unknown. So far so good. This struggle often fell into a particular dramatic form as well, Turner further proposed. He suggested five stages, rather like a five-act play: an initial state of relative normality; the introduction of dramatic tension (some violation of ordinary social norms, or “breach”); further dramatic complications (“mounting crisis”); climax and denouement (“redress”); and either a happy or a sad ending (“reintegration” or the “schism” of the social group that was together at the beginning of

the drama) (see Turner 1957: 91–93).

Real social life does not follow nearly so neat a dramatic form, however. There will be instances of crisis and of partial redress in the description that follows. But the drama these residents of Hasbrouck Fourth acted out in 1984–1985 resembles a much more experimental piece of theater than anything Turner proposed, a multiauthor play with unpredictable entrances and exits, unconventional patterns of climax and resolution, and a continually changing audience.

6 / As both of us knew, however, I was actually on Hasbrouck Fourth because that was where my roommate Rich had already been placed by the housing lottery. Rich had been a freshman in a small class I had taught the spring before. During the summer, when I had started thinking about returning to research in the dorms, I had contacted him and asked him if he would consider having a professor as a roommate for the following year. He had amiably agreed. We had one other roommate, a senior who was around so little that, to simplify description, I have left him out of this account. The room was a double; a top bunk had been moved into it for me. So I was not depriving any legitimate student of a room by my

presence on Hasbrouck Fourth (I had made similar space arrangements on Erewhon Third in 1978).

7 / Actually there were fifteen freshmen and three sophomore transfer students on the floor. But the transfers acted like—and tended to be treated like—freshmen, so I am combining them to simplify description.

Hasbrouck Fourth had many returning sophomore residents in 1984 because so many freshmen had enjoyed being on the floor in 1983, *and* because many of last year’s freshmen had been lucky in the annual housing lottery. Once you got a low enough number to return to the dorms, you had preferential admission to your old floor, though not to any particular room in it. The returning sophomores were mostly males, twelve out of seventeen. Four of the nine juniors and seniors on Hasbrouck Fourth were also returning students, two males and two females.

There were also eighteen new sophomore residents, also skewed toward males; eleven were males. It is not clear why the housing authorities had put so many new upperclassmen on the floor. They could as easily have made freshmen a priority once the returning sophomores had been accommodated.

The average Rutgers dorm floor had declining proportions of fresh-

men, sophomores, juniors, and seniors living on it. Through all the residential facilities in the college, 35 percent of the occupants were freshmen, 25 percent were sophomores, 20 percent were juniors, and 20 percent were seniors. But many of the juniors and seniors were not living on dorm floors set up like Hasbrouck Fourth and Gates Third. Rather, they lived in more private apartments provided to upperclassmen by the university.

8 / I have labeled this clique and those that follow with the names of one or two of the more striking members for descriptive purposes only, not to imply any kind of formal leadership on the part of Dan or the other named individuals. Cliques have their more or less influential individuals; ideologically, however, they are purely democratic.

9 / There was in fact a seventh member of this clique living on Hasbrouck Fourth, Len, a sophomore with no dorm housing on campus, who spent two or three nights a week sleeping on the floor in George’s triple room. As crowded as the dorms already were, they were so essential to college life as the students enjoyed it that extra floor members of this sort were common in the residence halls. One of the awards the residence

life staff placed on the floor awards ballot at the end of the year, for instance, was "honorary floor member."

10 / The argot of their all-male clique was also vividly sexist, full of male locker-room language. Ignoring its often deplorable contents, however, it was a linguistically impressive brew, rich in ellipsis, allusion, metonymy, metaphor, and irony. In the following example, members of Dan's clique also managed to make virtually the only spontaneous literary reference I heard in an entire year of dorm banter on Hasbrouck Fourth.

In the low-side lounge, in the hearing of several other floor residents, two members of Dan's clique were discussing a woman they had met at a party the night before. "Box is thinkin' Ahab," one of them commented cryptically about her. The other nodded his head in vigorous agreement. A male listener, half in the clique and half out, decoded all but one word. *Box* is an old male vulgarism referring to the female genitalia; here it meant "that girl as a sexual object." "Is thinkin'" was a very loose connective in their slang; here it meant "I think that [that girl as a sexual object] was . . ." But the listener didn't understand the rest of the predicate:

Listener: Wait a minute. *Ahab*? What is that? Is that a name or something?

Clique member: Ahab, as in *Moby Dick*, as in whale, dickbrain!

And therefore, via a double metonymy and a metaphor, the utterance meant "I think that that girl as a sexual object was fat and undesirable." ("Ahab" pointed indexically to Melville's literary classic, which pointed in turn to "whale," which stood metaphorically for a big, fat, unattractive person.)

11 / The major fields of study of the undergraduates on Hasbrouck Fourth amounted to the normal mix for American college students in the 1980s: lots of economics and "business"; moderate amounts of psychology, communication, and computer science; some of the larger "liberal arts" (English, political science); and the occasional oddball interest (art history). The hardest-working student scientists often chose to live across the river with the other "techies," in the dorms on the science campus of Rutgers College. See chapter 7 for more on the status of the majors among the undergraduates.

12 / Ordinary double rooms in dorms with Hasbrouck's layout

were twelve by twelve and a half feet on the floor, for about eighty-one square feet per resident. Ordinary triples were larger, with similar space per resident. "Voluntary" triples, on the other hand—increasingly common as the housing crunch on campus grew worse—divided ordinary doubles between three roommates, for an average of only a little over fifty square feet per resident.

13 / Many of these poor Latins were exceptionally tidy housekeepers in their own small apartments in the city, and in general considered mainstream American culture to be a much less hygienic one than their own. They needed a strong work ethic to put up with the Rutgers dorms. Their own teenagers tended to be much tidier than these privileged college students were.

14 / The job of the preceptors in September 1984 was not made any easier by the approach that university officials had decided to take, writing up the new regulations in a way that allegedly centered on undergraduate choice and responsibility. Every dorm floor was supposed to set its own collective standards for liquor use. It had to do so within limits set by the university, however. And these limits were so distant from any

student consensus about drinking that they struck the average dorm resident as simply "more bullshit from the deans." For example, any legal party was required to have students in attendance who were of drinking age to make sure that no underage persons drank. But these monitors themselves couldn't drink while performing their duties. There had to be a minimum of one of them for every twenty party-goers. Did the students on a given dorm floor want to require more monitors? One for every ten party guests?

15 / Liquor and near-drunkenness were central to partying for white, mainstream American students at Rutgers in particular. European exchange students were often surprised at the social importance of alcohol for the average Rutgers undergraduate. And, it was widely agreed on the Hispanic special-interest floor in another dorm in September 1984, the new liquor regulations were no particular problem among Latin students; for the Latins, a party was about dancing. And what was the big problem if you couldn't have a large bowl of lethal punch sitting in the center of the lounge? You could always nip into your room for a drink if you wanted one.

16 / I did not just hear

about the wedgie, in fact. One afternoon, some of the patrollers demonstrated the wedgie in my presence by suddenly giving it to a nonresident youth who in their opinion had been hanging around Hasbrouck Fourth too much. Four of them grabbed him and reached down through the tops of his trousers to the tops of his underwear, pulling them, and him, up. His feet were off the ground and his head literally against the roof of the dorm room before his underwear tore and its pieces could be pulled up and out by the patrollers. The victim laughed nervously and went off to the men's room to inspect the damage to his tender parts. And he took the hint and never returned to Hasbrouck Fourth. The patrollers threatened me with my very own wedgie on two occasions as well. Once they tried to suborn my roommate to leave our door unlocked one night. He didn't.

17 / George remembered trying to outfox the patrol in his freshman year by sleeping naked. It hadn't worked. They had "nudied" him instead, he said; that is, they had thrown him out of his room, naked, to run hunched over through the halls, hands in front of his privates, until someone took pity on him and threw him a bathrobe.

18 / The American college prank has a tradition all its own, of course. And by the standards of the past, these current stunts were penny-ante stuff. Given the size of Rutgers in the 1980s, it was also doubtful that any pranks stayed for long in the collective memory of anyone but the small groups who performed them; I never heard of one in the 1970s or 1980s that students in the entire college knew about, or one that was more than a year or two old.

In the past, on the other hand, undergraduate pranks in the much smaller student body were often told and retold for generations. One common prank at many American colleges had the transformation rule, Introduce a large, inconvenient object into an inappropriate interior space. In the agrarian nineteenth century, it was a cow on the podium of the campus chapel or in the campus bell tower; in the industrial twentieth century, it was a sports car in the dorm room of an unpopular student. Both stunts had been pulled off at Rutgers, probably more than once. In the mid-1930s, some undergraduates had tricked the president of Rutgers into coming down to the New Brunswick train station at three in the morning to shake the hand of presidential candidate Alf Landon; the Rutgers

president was a vocal supporter of the Republicans against Roosevelt. Landon's campaign train then blew past the nonplussed college president and a few of his sleepy aides without slowing down, and the students involved were still bragging about the gag thirty years later (Lukac 1966: 160-161).

19 / *Moon*: to present someone with the sudden, unexpected vision of one's unclothed buttocks, round and shining like the white orb of the moon. In the presence of a victim, one turns around, bends over, and pulls one's trousers and underwear down about a foot. One's genitals usually remain politely covered by the trousers and underwear.

20 / Almost everyone on any dorm floor had friendships off the floor as well, of course.

21 / In a spoof of a freshman's first days at Rutgers written by a student in 1859, for example, the president of the college greeted the new freshman with a high-flown lecture about the student's duties and responsibilities in college:

"I sincerely hope, my son, that you will do credit to our instructions. . . . These are golden opportunities, if you will only improve them aright, my dear boy. . . . Youth is the time to gain knowledge most easily and most

thoroughly [and] to serve God . . ."

The freshman then ran into an upperclassman he knew from home, who gave him a different kind of advice:

"How are you, Herden, my boy? . . . What did you think of the Prex.? Fine old gentleman, isn't he? though he is getting a little touched about religion, you know. . . . Bet you ten to one that he couldn't, and didn't, let you off without telling you that 'youth was the time to serve the Lord.' Ha! ha! . . . Don't look so angry, now, it's no sort of use. I see that Prex. has inspired you with a great respect for him. . . . But then, you see, we look at these things differently, after a while. It's an American student's privilege to find fault with his professors. . . ."

Where will you board? At the charming Mrs. Donley's? . . . 'Dogmeat Hall'? Good! What! you told Prex. you had friends there? Did you tell him who they were? . . . It's well you didn't, or you would not have been half so graciously received the next time you happen to visit the old gentleman."
(Rutgers College 1859: 182-184).

22 / An example of one of Art's briefer routines (Fall 1984):

I was sittin' in class the other day, and there was this girl in front of

me? She was *so-ooo* beautiful! You know the kind of girl who just makes you “nerd out”? So she asked the time. And the guy next to her didn't have a watch. So instead of saying [affects nasal tone of nerd], “It's just five minutes till the end,” I reached out my arm to show her my watch. [Makes suave gesture, leaning forward toward imaginary girl and pulling back sleeve from left wrist.] Only I leaned too far forward. You know those little desks they have? [Makes gesture of losing balance, flailing around, and tipping disastrously forward.] Crash! I'm all over the floor. Scrambling around, books everywhere. [Pauses.] I wonder if she still loves me?

23 / *Cake* (short for “piece of cake”): easy.

24 / *Argue points*: to question exact grading decisions on each individual answer in an effort to raise one's overall grade on an exam.

25 / A cynical peer-group speech code was not peculiar to American college students, of course. As a backstage language spoken out of the hearing of those in authority, codes like this undoubtedly characterized persons in passive, non-decision-making positions at the bottom of all kinds of modern complex organizations—factory workers, privates in the army, etc. High school students

and other adolescents had their own ways of talking in this code. Collegiate Undergraduate Cynical might have had some distinctive features compared to the language of younger adolescents. It might have been more worldly-wise; it might have contained a wider range of things to be cynical about than high school codes did. I had the impression that new freshmen waited to see if older college students talked like this, and then slowly began practicing it themselves—being careful as freshmen, if they were smart, not to try to compete too quickly with the older and wiser sophomores.

Undergraduate Cynical was context-specific and age-specific as well. Student authorities who hadn't known me in the dorms, for instance, often looked surprised and shocked if I suddenly tried to drop into it with them. The students also abandoned Undergraduate Cynical surprisingly quickly when they moved into other roles. Student authorities, including some preceptors, often got very good at talking Deanly Officialese without showing any obvious stress about doing so. Though there were intermediate forms. For example:

Novice preceptor to residents of floor:
You've gotta come to this dorm meeting tonight. It's really impor-

tant. I know it sounds kinda stupid. But I'll really look bad if no one from this floor shows up. You don't want me to look bad, do you?

26 / This quote and subsequent quotes from this talk session have been transcribed from tape. Since I am not engaged in strict conversation analysis here, I have edited out some of the students' verbal hesitations and repairs. Otherwise, these words are exactly as the students spoke them.

27 / These talk sessions, which Rutgers students no longer called “bull sessions” or “rap sessions,” often became more serious and “cosmic” the later at night they occurred and the fewer students there were around. At 7:00 P.M. the students were usually more flip-pant in their lounge talk (for more on the contemporary, unlabeled college bull session, see chapter 7).

Obviously, Louie and Carrie were performing for my tape recorder, though I think they were performing naturalistically. Jay and the mysterious stranger, on the other hand, were probably not especially aware of the tape, and the stranger did not even stay around long enough to discover that he was a subject of research.

28 / Figure 3 is based on a questionnaire I circulated in late October to all sixty-two residents of Hasbrouck Fourth, giving every-

one the names of every other resident of the floor and asking them to identify their close friends, their friends, and persons they disliked or had a hard time getting along with. Fifty-seven residents responded. Most of them followed instructions and filled out the questionnaires privately and confidentially, returning them to me in a sealed envelope. A few close friends filled them out after mutual consultations with one another. Figure 4 is based on a similar questionnaire, which was circulated in early April.

29 / As Varenne has pointed out, most Americans do not believe that they themselves belong to cliques. They tend to see themselves as friendly people whose friendships are not determined by any group affiliations. They *may* belong to a “friendly group of people.” ‘I belong to a friendly group of people; *you* belong to a clique’ (see Varenne 1982). Hasbrouck Fourth residents, however, sometimes *did* say that they belonged to cliques when their friendship groups were unusually tight and exclusive, though they tended to use the term egocentrically when in ironic or self-critical moods.

30 / Proximity and college class had a general influence on friendship making, but to different degrees according to the particular

histories of different dorm-floor groups. On most floors, most reciprocated close friendships did develop between people on the same side of a floor and in the same section. On two other floors where this same questionnaire was given out in 1978, close friendships across the sections comprised only 8 percent and 21 percent of the totals respectively. Hasbrouck Fourth had a relatively high incidence of cross-section close friendships, 23 percent. One reason was the number of returning sophomores with new room assignments; some of the previous year's intrasection friendships turned into cross-section friendships in 1984. Other cross-section friendships, on the other hand, were new to the floor in 1984. Since the freshman Judy, for example, did not get along with her roommates and did not like the wedgie patrolers who dominated her side of Hasbrouck Fourth, she went looking elsewhere for friends, and found Leo and Carrie on the high side.

Interclass friendships also varied widely by floor. Hasbrouck Fourth had fewer close friendships between students of different college classes than either of the 1978 floors, possibly because of the dominance of the already-bonded sophomores on the floor. Only 24 percent of all the reciprocated

close friendships on Hasbrouck Fourth in the fall of 1984 were between persons of different college classes. On the two floors in 1978, which had more normal freshman-sophomore distributions than Hasbrouck Fourth, the interclass percentages were significantly higher, 40 percent and 47 percent. On the topic of close friendships within or between the sexes, see chapter 2, and note 39.

31 / Secret Santa as it was practiced by the students had all the sociological characteristics of ritual as identified by Emile Durkheim in his classic text *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), and as subsequently rediscovered by innumerable anthropologists in personal and tribal groups all over the world. It created a mood of what Durkheim called "social effervescence." It helped to release, or at least to express, certain key tensions—for Secret Santa, mostly sexual tensions. And it ultimately centered on an important collective value: the importance of floor friendliness.

What connection was there between the embarrassing stunts in Secret Santa and floor friendliness? The American cultural rule, You should be willing to make an idiot of yourself in front of your friends. If, under the ritual circumstances of Secret Santa, you make an idiot of yourself in front of your coresi-

dents on a dorm floor, you are then reenacting all of them *as* friends. You are making them all back into friends—or at least into friendly acquaintances, whatever tensions and conflicts you may have had with one another over the previous three months. And this really happened among the students. Good rituals are transformative. See the changing relationship between Bob and Penny later in this chapter, for instance.

One irony of the deans' opposition to Secret Santa was that they themselves used exactly the same cultural premise ritualistically in their innumerable icebreakers during orientation. If you were encouraged to tell something personal to strangers, this made you feel more friendly toward them as a result (since friends tell one another personal things). In these terms, all that the deans were really arguing about was who got to set the ritual conditions, themselves or the students.

32 / Dan told one of the more riveting stories. During his freshman year, he explained, his Secret Santa challengers had wondered if they could come up with something too outrageous even for him, so they had dared him to perform a striptease in Commons. As he remembered it a year later, he had walked over around five thirty on an evening in early December,

when the dining hall tended to be most crowded. Dan had studied method acting, and he recalled concentrating and visualizing on the way over, getting himself in the proper actorish mood. Once at Commons, with a few friends as witnesses, he had jumped up on an empty table, turned on some music on the portable tape deck that he had brought with him, and begun to do a slow bump-and-grind. One by one, he had taken off his garments, twirling each one around and then throwing it out into the crowd. Hundreds of students had looked up from their meals in astonishment, Dan said, hooting, cheering, and clapping, and some of the adult cafeteria workers had come out to gawk. When he was down to a pair of purple underwear, a few students had run up and stuffed dollar bills into them in the manner of fans of barroom go-go dancers. For a climax, Dan had whipped around, bent over, and mooned the crowd.

And then, Dan said, "When the music stopped and I was down off the table dressed only in my purple 'wares, I suddenly popped out of my mood. And I couldn't *believe* how embarrassed I was!" He had thrown on another set of clothes and run back to Hasbrouck Fourth, where his Secret Santa stunt became the stuff of local legend for a year or two.

33 / The freshman student's mostly white peers may also have been commenting on the inappropriateness of a white liking "black" music. Though "heavy metal," a type of rock-and-roll involving very loud music, was virtually invented by black star Jimi Hendrix, it is stereotypically a white rather than a black musical taste. On musical taste and racial identity among the undergraduates, see chapter 4.

34 / *To cream* (for a male): to ejaculate sexually.

35 / Lois was an older female residence life authority.

36 / "KUT" is the name of a sorority.

37 / In the months in which this quarrel was brewing, Pete's aspersions on me had had an effect on Carrie, and I couldn't get her version of most of these events. When I did talk to her about the dispute months later when we were friends again, she was unwilling to talk about its possible racial aspects; she just wanted to forget the whole thing, she implied.

38 / To be fair to Art, I think I *would* have remembered it if he had said anything blatantly racist during his diatribe. His rantings, I think, had been more along the lines of "No one threatens me" and "You have no right to say the things you've said."

39 / As Brian put it, he was tired of girls thinking he was *just* a nice guy, coming to him with their problems about this guy and that guy, asking for advice, and never thinking about him "that way." As already indicated (chapter 2), cross-sex friendships among the students in the coed dorms were sometimes speculations on the part of one of the partners, relationships undertaken in the hope that something closer would develop.

The degree of gender segregation in the Hasbrouck Fourth friendship network by the spring of 1984 was probably atypical, however, a product of other idiosyncracies of the floor. In the fall, 24 percent of the close friendships on Hasbrouck Fourth had been cross-sex relationships, declining to 9 percent in the spring. On the two other dorm floors tested with this same questionnaire in 1978, on the other hand, almost half of all the reported reciprocated close friendships around the middle of the years were cross-sex friendships, 47 percent and 40 percent respectively.

40 / As I saw Secret Santa played on Hasbrouck Fourth, for instance, the student audience responded to particular performances with highly nuanced attention to the personality of the students performing. A shy student who ob-

viously had a very difficult time performing at all was generally encouraged and won praise even for standing up and trying. A self-confident extrovert, on the other hand, might be received with jeers and catcalls, which she or he apparently often enjoyed as much as the audience enjoyed giving them. Students clearly did try to get one another with some of the stunts. But there were many ways to get the challenger back. You could renegotiate a challenge—"I'm not doing this one; try again" (challenges reached victims through intermediaries). Or you could win points by meeting the letter of the challenge while cleverly avoiding its intent. In another dorm, for instance, a shy girl was challenged to give a lecture on masturbation, and did so—in Italian. Or you could perform an embarrassing challenge with so much vigor and esprit that you triumphed over it: you as actor in the stunt could win credit for what they had made you as actor do in the stunt.

Another strict rule was that anything done in Secret Santa was specially framed in time and space. As the students put it, "The stunts don't mean anything." "They're just for fun." "No one should take anything personally that happens during Secret Santa." The Secret Santa stunts were folk theater. Like

all good rituals, they were set apart; they were privileged, self-conscious performances.

41 / See, for instance, Davis 1971 and Gillis 1974:19–35.

42 / See chapter 2, note 17, for an indication of the centrality of the average college dorm floor to student friendship-making in the college.

43 / *Airhead* ("gasbag"): someone who talks all the time but has nothing intelligent to say.

44 / *To get fucked up*: to drink too much or to ingest too much of an illegal substance.

45 / One way the deans could try to interfere with this 'natural' process of student-to-student enculturation was by segregating the freshmen from upperclassmen residentially; over the years, the freshman dorm *has* been a recurrent strategy of deanly control at Rutgers. The deans first instituted freshman dorms in the early 1930s in order, they said, to foster "class spirit." But these dorms also clearly functioned to cut the average freshman off from the average upperclassman and perhaps from the Undergraduate Cynical frame of mind (assuming that the few upperclass preceptors who were allowed in these dorms did not introduce them to it).

In the late 1960s, Rutgers students themselves helped to bring

about the demise of the original freshman dorms, on the grounds that it was “discriminatory” to make a freshman live in a certain place because of her or his college class. The deans at Rutgers College were quietly renovating them on a “pilot” basis in the 1980s, however, with preceptors and a few other upperclass “mentors.” The freshmen in the revived freshman dorms often did say that they liked living in them, partly because everyone started off on an equal footing; there were no old-timers around with their preestablished cliques. But they also said that they had to go elsewhere to get essential upperclass wisdom about various aspects of the undergraduates’ college, about beating the bureaucracy, about good and bad professors, and so on. Other students in the college sometimes stigmatized the revived freshman residence halls at Rutgers by calling them “diaper dorms.”

46 / Five ex-residents of Hasbrouck Fourth (all ex-sophomores, all males) were enrolled as students in a large class I taught about my Rutgers research in 1987, so I invited them to come up and comment, as a panel of local experts, on my preliminary analysis of the floor. All of them agreed that Hasbrouck Fourth had been full of problems in 1984–1985, that it had not been a typi-

cal Rutgers dorm floor, though several of them also said that they had had very good times on the floor that year. Most of them said that Pete had been a lousy preceptor. One of the wedgie patrollers said he had grown up a lot since he engaged in those sophomoric activities. But he certainly did not regret them, and he thought I blamed the wedgie patrol too much in my analysis of the dynamics of Hasbrouck Fourth in the early fall, he said.

I had soft-pedaled Art and Carrie’s fight during my classroom presentation, but Art, one of the commentators in 1987, brought it up again in all its vivid detail. He was still angry with Carrie; he apparently still felt that she had introduced racially based threats in an inappropriate way. But after he told the class his version of their fight—referring to Carrie with the phrase “let’s call her *Grace Jones*” and giving her a stereotypic black accent, which she didn’t have at all—I felt that I had to make some strong comments from the podium about undergraduate racism at Rutgers. I noted that Carrie might have told the whole thing very differently; that Art’s own behavior had not been entirely impeccable; that black students, in my observations, had to work somewhat harder than the average white student to live amiably on the average

“integrated” Rutgers dorm floor; and so on. See chapter 4.

47 / It is impossible to know for sure about a judgment like this, of course, or about other, more subtle control effects that my presence may have exerted on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985. One—always a potential influence in participant observation—was that by poking around all year long, I had made the residents of the floor more self-conscious about local culture and local social processes than they otherwise would have been. If so, that consciousness may have changed the culture and the processes themselves (the social scientist, or the “hard” scientist, always changes what she or he is studying by the act of studying it, as the Intro to Methodology lecture always goes).

At the end of the year, I circulated a short questionnaire, which I asked the residents to return without signing. “Are you aware of ways in which my presence has changed things on the floor this year?” I asked them. Some residents said that I had had no effect that they were aware of. Others said there had been certain goings-on from which the students had shielded me, some “partying” behavior, some sexual activities, the use of drugs, etc. And some respondents said that, though my presence had never changed their

own behavior, they had noticed it had changed the behavior of other residents. Some people on the floor, they reported, had exaggerated everything they said and did when I was around. For example, when my tape recorder was on, the ordinarily boisterous members of the wedgie patrol clique had become even more boisterous than usual.

There is no reason why greater self-consciousness would necessarily have led to greater conflict on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985, however; it could as easily have had the opposite effect. And the other side of this reflexive coin was another common observation made by Hasbrouck Fourth residents on these questionnaires. At least half of them told me, politely or not so politely, that as a once-a-week resident, I was around so little on the floor that most of the time they had not even been aware that I was there.

48 / The crackdown on Secret Santa has continued at Rutgers; but two years later, rumors do occasionally reach my ears from reliable student sources that it continues to be played surreptitiously on occasion, complete with the challenges, in particularly secret nooks and crannies of the dorms.

And the alternatives, if anything, can be worse. One dorm

group in 1987 decided to replace Secret Santa with a drinking game centering on a collective viewing of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." The Grinch reminded them of common childhood pleasures, and the drinking—keyed to certain events and words in the cartoon—got them all smashed, and bonded, even more reliably than Secret Santa had done, they felt.

49 / There was a resemblance, in fact, between what Pete did on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984

and what the Robeson residents were thought to have done on Erewhon Third in 1978 (next chapter), though the motivations were very different. But both were perceived as unfriendly. And unfriendliness was the ultimate sin in the norms of ordinary dorm sociability, the one thing guaranteed to make everyone else almost irrationally angry.

50 / *To ralph*: to vomit (onomatopoeic).

FOUR / Race and Individualism

How did undergraduates in the "white" majority at Rutgers, about eighty percent of the student body in the mid-1980s, think about and act toward their black peers? The students often said they liked or thought they benefited from the diversity of Rutgers, from the fact that, as a public institution, it attracted youths from all the different social groups in the state of New Jersey (see chapter 2). Yet many of them found real cultural differences distressing and intolerable when they actually had to live with them, and racial differences often made them even more uncomfortable.

The white students almost all knew that American blacks had been treated badly in the past. They almost all knew that they themselves should not be racists any longer, that, as sociologist Gunnar Myrdal has stated in *An American Dilemma*, traditional American racism was a violation of the American "value premise" of equal opportunity for all (1944: 23–25). But in ways that will become clearer below, I hope, the students' fundamental individualism was also simply too nonhistorical and non-sociological to allow them to grasp interracial situations of any real complexity. Some white students lived with the ensuing quandary as uneasy liberals. Others entertained the only apparent alternative given their individualistic ways of thinking about much more complicated human realities: the illiberal sentiments of racism.

Race was only incidentally important on Hasbrouck Fourth in 1984–1985. It was one possible subtext of Art and Carrie's fight, though Art was probably just as upset with Carrie as an assertive woman as he was with her as a black (see chapter 3). Otherwise the four blacks and the one Puerto Rican student on Hasbrouck Fourth—and the two Asian-Americans and the two or three Latins—lived reasonably amiably among their white peers all year long.² This was partly because they were swamped by the white majority on an "integrated" floor like Hasbrouck Fourth. It was also, unquestionably, because they lived on the floor on the terms of the white majority. None of them were "threatening." None of them made much of her or his black or Puerto Rican identity.