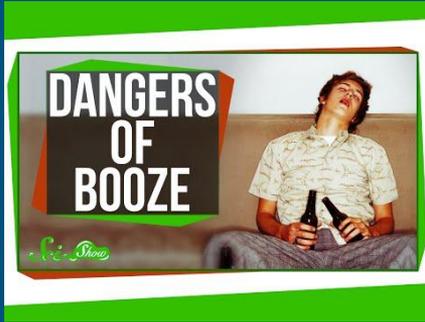


Where Team Culture Meets Party Culture

An Ethnographic Interview Exploring High
School Life



Background on the subculture



According to the CDC:

- $\frac{1}{3}$ of American high school students have consumed alcohol in the past month
- 18% have binge-drunk

The goal of this interview is to understand these statistics in the context of the high school cross country and track team of an affluent, predominantly white suburb, and what it means to be different in that social context.

Questions to ask

- 1) How did you become part of the team?
- 2) Can you describe some of your teammates?
- 3) How were you introduced to the social life of the team?
- 4) How much time did it take for you to become involved in activities outside of practice/meets?
- 5) At your peak involvement with the team, how much of your social life was part of team life?
- 6) How long were you involved before you decided to quit these “extra-curricular” activities?
- 7) How has your relationship with your team changed because of it?

The interviewee

In order to protect identity of the subject and establish rapport, her name will be omitted

-Ethnicity: Han Chinese, Irish
-Age: 17, Senior in high school

-Sex: female

-Appearance: long brown hair, cherubic face (smiles frequently), athletic build, medium stature

Subject "H" has been involved with the Horace Greeley cross country team ("XC") and track team since her freshman year, becoming a captain in her senior year.



“They were my only friends”



H began high school as a new student. “When I moved to Greeley, I didn’t know anyone.” While it wasn’t “the struggle of a lifetime, it was definitely hard for me. That was proolly [sic] my main motivation for joining XC--finding friends. I wasn’t that great of a runner, but it was fun for me.” (H, characteristically humble, understates her achievement; she was good enough to make varsity in her first year.) “Everyone on the team was really friendly; it’s a pretty small group, so you get to know each other pretty fast...I’d say “hi” to them in the halls, sit with them at lunch...Pretty soon, I was hanging out with them outside of school, especially the other girls.” In hindsight, they wouldn’t have been her “first-choice friends”; H describes them as “preppy, which was not something I was used to, coming from a school that was not as rich. Lot’s of Patagonia, Vineyard Vines--y’know [laughs]. It didn’t really bother me; I just couldn’t really relate to them.”

“I didn’t really mind at first”

H would “hang out with the team sometimes after practice, on weekends. We’d go to the diner, to their houses. Some of the kids would get like beer, they had like older siblings get it for them. Which, to me, is weird--like my sister would not be stupid enough to buy beer for me. Or [name redacted] had like a fake ID, or something. I never drank, but that honestly wasn’t really a problem; I didn’t really feel pressured. I didn’t really mind at first, when it was just a small group of us. They would play like card games or like Mario Cart...” This was by the middle of her Freshman year. “It got worse when it started becoming, like, actual parties.” At first, H was “kind of excited” to be invited to these parties, which consisted of students on many teams, often hosted by members of the football, basketball, and lacrosse teams. “I thought I was, like, hot [expletive], being invited to these things as a freshman. I went, even though I didn’t really enjoy it.”



“It took some time to make new friends”

“It wasn’t, like, a big thing” when H limited her teammate interaction to during practice. H decided to stop going these parties after police broke up a rather rowdy one in the fall of her Sophomore year. “I hadn’t really gone to that many--like fifteen? Is that a lot? *[laughs]*...I was pretty uncomfortable at them. To fit in, I’d carry around like a beer, sip at it, make it look like I was fitting in.” H had two teammates whom she considered “actual friends,” upperclassmen girls on the team who she’d often spend time with at these events. “I’d often leave with them before things got really bad.” (H’s curfew was 11; her parents were not aware of these parties.) H witnessed rampant binge drinking, “kind of creepy party games, boys trying to take advantage of girls.” H is not sure what happened the night police arrived, as she had left before then, and people tell her competing stories about what transpired. “I was pretty shaken. I didn’t really want to hang out with the other kids on the team anymore, but I didn’t really have anyone else...”



“We’re friends, but we’re not *friends*”



“It wasn’t fun feeling like the new kid again.” But by the end of her sophomore year, H had a new circle of friends: “I’m active in the SPCA club, so I have friends from that. I started making friends with kids in my classes...It was definitely hard; there would be lunches where I would feel that I had no choice but to sit with teammates, just because I wanted to be alone. But I really didn’t want to. I’d kind of grown a disdain for them, like ‘I don’t want to be a part of what you do.’... I mean, I still acknowledge them in the hallways; we talk during practice. It’s not like when I stopped going to parties or hanging out with them that I just stopped talking to them completely. It’s just not the same.” H acknowledges that her struggle to find the right friends for her was not unique experience. “Talking to other kids, this is a pretty common experience.” Some advice? “Diversify your friends! [*laughs*] Don’t just hang out with the same one group; you don’t want to end up like me, feeling like you have to ditch everyone you know.”

Conclusion: Team culture is party culture

H's experience explains how Horace Greeley's sports teams exhibit elements of a subculture that distinguish them from the main "culture" (really a subculture itself) of the school. They isolate themselves socially, often limiting their friend groups and socializing to teammates (in H's case, this was her only socializing outside of school). They distinguish themselves with a style of dress that H describes as "preppy," consisting of specific brands that demonstrate their status. One of the biggest components of this is imbibing alcohol. (This is not to say that only students who play sports drink.) As H proves, it is impossible to be part of the team culture without partaking in the party culture. Although she is ostensibly a member of the team, by withdrawing from team ritual, she marks herself as different and cannot be fully part of the subculture.

