

Reflections from the Bricks

Written by Rowan Beaudoin-Friede, Brooks School Editor
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10:30 p.m.: “Lights out guys!”

More like, “Hey, it’s been ten minutes, do you think the dorm parents are asleep yet?” My freshman year, the answer invariably was no. Five minutes later, we’d all run back into the laid-carpet, fluorescent-lit halls for another game of wall-frisbee (a monstrosity involving high-speed projectiles and few clothes) until, at 10:45PM, the dorm parents would storm back into the halls and all underclassmen would scatter to their rooms, scurrying like mice before the proverbial cat.

Dorm life is wonderful. Simple put, it is one of the most unusual, enjoyable, and eye-opening learning experiences I’ve had over the past four years. In health class (or “Life-Skills”, or “Self-in Community”—see the expression, “lipstick on a pig”), people discuss leadership, boundaries, accountability, decision-making, social-dynamics, and how to handle peer-pressure. Dorm-life is the lived experience of these continually discussed, yet often mocked, ideas.

Whitney is one of Brook’s oldest buildings and its oldest dorm. Due to its age, living in Whitney fosters a certain, intangible sense of camaraderie amongst its residents; we’ve all had that morning, or string of mornings, where a “hot-shower” just isn’t an option. We come from different places, have different political views, like different music, but at the end of the day, all experience midnight fire-alarms in December and sleep in the same oppressive heat.

Sadly, this very sense of familiarity paves the way for cavalier and often intentionally unkind behavior given mass consent and affirmation by the screaming silence of bystanders—“If you’re not against all this, you’re for it, or you might as well be” (Clifford Bradshaw, *Cabaret*). For example, if someone is trying to go to sleep, people may repeatedly go in their room and turn the lights on.

You may be thinking, “Who the hell does this guy think he is?” Or, “It’s just screwing around—nobody means any of it! Guys will be guys...you know? All just jokes.” To a certain extent, that’s indubitably true. But consider this: most teenagers are shitty comedians. Although many of his ideas are “mind-bogglingly, catastrophically wrong” (Gizmodo), I think Freud was right in suggesting jokes are true. “A joke is truth wrapped in a smile.” The exception to this would be sarcasm. People are sarcastic in the dorm all the time: “I love when there’s no hot water. Oh boy, aren’t these new shower stalls great? Mr. X is the strictest dorm partner ever!” etc. etc. There’s nothing wrong with sarcasm or making jokes. However, singling out individuals for repeated abuse is immoral, unkind, and a sad reality in dorms.

Furthermore, bullying is not an issue unique to one sex. In the beginning of the year, a girl and some friends decided to play a prank on her roommate by setting alarms to go off throughout the night. This prank happened for almost a week...hilarious. (See, sarcasm!) In this case, the group mentality and lack of speaking-up led to dorm meetings, lectures from dorm parents and prefects,

and reprimanded sophomores. Understanding boundaries and the simply speaking-out could have avoided this outcome.

Boarding schools claim to have strict rules regarding drug use, forewarning swift and severe punishments for people caught using. At Brooks, the “possession, use or sale of alcohol, unprescribed drugs or associated paraphernalia” or “the misuse of prescription drugs” is considering a violation of major school rules. When people are caught, they often do face severe punishment. The key word here is “caught.” Fortunately, the drug presence in my dorm is negligible this year. Regardless, drug and alcohol use can also be an uncomfortable part of dorm life. Often, students who don't participate are put in the awkward situation of knowing about something and feeling compelled by school rules to report but not wanting to for fear of losing social status in the dorm and being branded as a “snitch, bitch, or narc.” Conversely, a lot of people take the mindset of, “Hey, that’s their decision and I have nothing to do with it.” In my experience, there isn't a lot of peer pressure to do drugs. If you're not interested, people respect that. The biggest issue with drug use in dorms, other than the obvious health ramifications, is when it jeopardizes the well-being of other dorm members. For example, imagine it’s a Saturday and a bunch of people are watching SNL in the common room when someone walks in with an e-cig and starts vaping. At that point, everyone in the common room can get in trouble. Beyond being stupid, it would be inconsiderate.

Notwithstanding the potential for uncomfortable situations and unkind behavior, dorm life is immeasurably valuable in teaching lessons about personal accountability, decision-making, personal boundaries, social-interactions, and peer-pressure. In *Men In Black*, Agent K says, "A person is smart; people are dumb." To me, this exemplifies the paradox of dorm life. We are all surrounded by smart people who just want to have good laugh. The bummer is, sometimes the joke isn't funny.