TWO / "What College is REALLY Like"

My first, most vivid impression from the dorms was how different college looked from the point of view of the undergraduates. The students' Rutgers was obviously not the same institution the professors and other campus authorities thought they knew. The college was a very complicated place, made more complicated by its inclusion in a bigger and even more confusing university. Very few administrators understood all of it—even its formal organization—let alone how it actually worked. Most campus adults did not even try; they simply did their best to grasp those small parts of the college and the university that they needed to understand. The students did the same. And the undergraduates and the professors—and the janitors and the buildings and grounds men and the campus police and the campus bus drivers and the secretaries and the graduate students and the librarians and the deans and the administrators and the public relations staff and the president—were all in contact with very different bits of institutional Rutgers.[1]

Thus, to highlight only those differences I knew best, the students had no idea of most of what the professors spent their time doing and thinking about: research, publication, and department politics. Student friends in the dorms who knew I was a faculty member were surprised to discover that I had written a book, or even that I had my Ph.D. Two sophomore friends once admitted to me that they had always privately thought that "tenure" meant a faculty member had been around for "ten years." Most students were not sure of the relation between the two most immediate authorities in their lives, the dean of students and the dean of Rutgers College. And very few of them could name any of the higher-level university officials between these two deans at the bottom of the administration and the president of Rutgers University at the top.

Most Rutgers professors, on the other hand, would not have known how to do what the students had to accomplish successfully every semester—how to balance college and major requirements against the time and space demands of Rutgers classrooms, how to get to their classes on

63

time on the overcrowded campus bus system, and how to push their academic needs through a half-efficient, sometimes impolite university bureaucracy. Most faculty members no longer possessed the ability to sit passively through long lectures without ever once getting a chance to open their own mouths. Few faculty members could have named the dean of students at Rutgers College. Most of them had never heard of some of the commoner terms in undergraduate slang in the 1980s. Almost all of them would have been confused and uncomfortable in the average dorm talk session, and none of them would have had any inkling of how to go about locating a good party on the College Avenue Campus on a Thursday night.

The different perspectives of the students and of campus adults were also rooted in generation, of course. Professors and other campus authorities were not in the same position in the typical American middle-class life cycle as college adolescents. College was a profession for most campus adults. It was the way station to a hoped-for profession—not to an academic one, in most cases—for most students. Presumably you had already come of age if you were a campus adult. Usually you were still coming of age if you were a student.

And generational differences, finally, were historical differences. In an effort to empathize with the students, campus authorities sometimes tried to think back to when they were college youths. They almost always got it wrong. Memory was selective, of course. But aside from this, student culture and youth culture have changed every ten or twenty years in two centuries of the history of higher education in the United States. And the relation of every undergraduate generation to historical and social events in the wider world has always been different. One's own past student experience never serves as an adequate map for the present.

I came of age in college in the early 1960s, for example. I was on the peak of the postwar baby boom wave. Everything was always cresting for my generation. The economy was always growing; our schools were always expanding; our SATs were always going up. I knew I could study whatever I was interested in; I would always get a good job after college. In college my first year at Dartmouth, we still observed some of the old traditions established in the late nineteenth century—hats, hazing, college patriotism, and so on. I was in graduate school during the late sixties. That was the first time I had ever allowed myself to pay attention to noncollegiate youth culture, to rock-and-roll. I was also grateful for the onset of the second American sexual revolution in the twentieth century during those years, my early twenties. And, though I was not particularly active politically, I found the late sixties exciting times to be young and on campus. It seemed like something new was always going on. It was difficult to be bored.

My student friends at Rutgers in the late seventies and early eighties, on the other hand, had been on the downside of the same demographic wave from which my own generation had benefited. They had grown up in much more uncertain, cynical-making times than I had, during the Vietnam collapse, Watergate, and the pallid years of Jimmy Carter's America. The economy was tighter. If your college education did not get you into the job market, what would? In high school, almost none of them would have dared to neglect the sort of universal youth culture centering on music that had thoroughly established itself in the sixties. They had also lived in a more extensively sexualized culture than I had. In college, the late sixties were ancient history to them. The occasional campus demonstrations were exciting events, part of college life as they expected to find it in the late seventies and early eighties. But students in the 1980s also expected the ambience of the typical college demonstration to be slightly archaic—to be a culture capsule from the sixties, as it were. And most of them had never heard of the quaint old customs of college life whose last vestiges I had experienced at Dartmouth in the early sixties.

There were continuities as well as changes from generation to generation in undergraduate student culture. Some aspects of the students' college as I discovered them during my dorm research were identical or similar to those from my own undergraduate days; living among the students simply served to remind me of what they were. Other things were brand new, and at first they were often very hard to see. Much of the effort involved in this research was descriptive in the most basic sense of the term: learning to notice what one did not normally notice given one's original assumptions, in this case about the students.

Thus, in my first full year in the dorms, on Erewhon Third in 1978–1979, I was most aware of what was missing from student culture in the late seventies. Student life did not remind me of the late sixties. Nor did it remind me of older, more "traditional," American college life either. After my first ethnographic year among the students, I improved my imagination about the present through historical research into past forms of stu-

dent culture and western youth culture.[2] And when I returned to the dorms in 1984–1985, I began to perceive things that I had entirely missed—that I had literally not looked at—in the late seventies.

For most faculty members, *the* purpose of higher education is what goes on in the classroom: learning critical thinking, how to read a text, mathematical and scientific skills, expert appreciation and technique in the arts, and so on. Some educational theorists propose broader, more humanistic goals for a college education, especially for the liberal arts: to produce "more competent, more concerned, more complete human being[s]" (Boyer 1987:1); to give students a "hope of a higher life . . . civilization" (Bloom 1987:336). And, almost all college authorities assume, whatever is valuable about college for the undergraduates is or ought to be the result of the deliberate impact, direct or indirect, of college adults such as themselves on the students.

Professors and other campus authorities do know, of course, that the students get up to other things in college. Many of them remember that they themselves got up to other things in college. But, in their present mature opinions, the "other things" that contemporary students are getting up to at the moment are either to be ignored or to be discouraged. Or they are, at best, the trimmings of a higher education. The main course—the essence of college—is its serious, high-minded goals as articulated and understood by its adult leaders.

65

The Rutgers students I knew in my research agreed that classroom learning was an important part of their college educations. College would not be college, after all, without "academics"—professors, grades, requirements, and a bachelor's degree after four years. Most students also agreed that college should be a broadening experience, that it should make you a better, more open, more liberal, more knowledgeable person. But, in the students' view of things, not all this broadening happened through the formal curriculum. At least half of college was what went on outside the classroom, among the students, with no adults around.

Beyond formal education, college as the students saw it was also about coming of age. It was where you went to break away from home, to learn responsibility and maturity, and to do some growing up.[3] College was about being on your own, about autonomy, about freedom from the authority of adults, however benign their intentions. And last but hardly least, college was about fun, about unique forms of peer-group fun—before, in student conceptions, the grayer actualities of adult life in the real world began to close in on you.

About the middle of the nineteenth century, American undergraduates started calling this side of college—the side that belonged to them, the side that corresponded to late-adolescent development in college the way *they* wanted to experience it—"college life" (Horowitz 1987:23–55, Kett 1977:174–182, Moffatt 1985a). And so they still referred to it in the late twentieth century. American college life was originally a new adolescent culture entirely of the students' own creation, arguably the first of the modern age-graded youth cultures that were to proliferate down to preteens by the late twentieth century. It was a boisterous, pleasure-filled, group-oriented way of life: hazing and rushing, fraternities and football, class loyalty, college loyalty, and all the other "old traditions" celebrated in later alumni reminiscences.

College life had changed almost out of recognition a century later, however. By the 1980s, it was much closer to the private lives of the students. It no longer centered on the older organized extracurriculum. Nor was it an elite culture of youth any longer. Now it was populistically available to almost all students on campus, and it was for "coed" rather than for strictly masculine pleasures. But college life was still very much at the heart of college as the undergraduates thought of it in the late twentieth century. Together with the career credential conferred on them by their bachelor's degree, it was their most important reason for coming to college in the first place, their central pleasure while in it, and what they often remembered most fondly about college after they graduated. Let us look at its contours in more detail, as the students thought of it and experienced it at Rutgers in the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

WORK AND PLAY

College life, first of all, involved an understanding among the students about the proper relationship between work and play in college, about the relative value of inside-the-classroom education versus extracurricular fun. A century ago, the evaluation was a simple one. Extracurricular fun and games and the lessons learned in the vigorous student-to-student

competitions that "made men"—athletics, class warfare, fraternity rushing—were obviously much more important than anything that happened to you in the classroom, as far as the students were concerned.

College students could not make the same aggressive anti-intellectual judgments in the late twentieth century, however. Most modern Rutgers students, like undergraduates elsewhere in the United States, instinctively knew what historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz has pointed out in an important new book on American undergraduate culture. Despite periodic crises of confidence in higher education in the United States (one is occurring as I write, in 1987), American parents have sent higher proportions of their children to college every single decade since 1890, and the trend continues in the 1980s. Why? Because, in the increasingly bureaucratic, impersonal, modern American economy, a college baccalaureate—and a good one with good grades—has become the indispensable initial qualification leading to the choicest occupations and professions via law school, business school, medical school, graduate school, and other types of professional postgraduate education. Once there were several routes to comfortable upper-middle-class status in the United States. And once, college could be a lazy affair. You could drift elegantly through Harvard as a "gentleman C" and still wind up in a prime law firm thanks to your family connections. No longer for other than a tiny portion of the American elite (Horowitz 1987:4–10).

What was the relation between work and play in contemporary student culture, then, and what were the preferred forms of play? Consider an unsophisticated but evocative image entitled "What College is REALLY Like" (figure 1). It comes from a scrapbook a Rutgers freshman put together privately in 1983 for his own enjoyment and apparently for later reminiscence, one of many montages of words and pictures the student had cut out of magazines and newspapers and arranged into his own designs.

Most of the image is obviously about college fun—sexuality, drinking, and entertainment—and, implicitly, about being on one's own to enjoy such things, away from parental controls. Its exemplars, comedian Bill Murray and rock musician Billy Idol, are not collegiate types as they might have been in the early twentieth century, young men in raccoon coats or football players. They are drawn from the national and international youth culture to which most American college students orient their sense of generation in the late twentieth century, a culture that comes to them

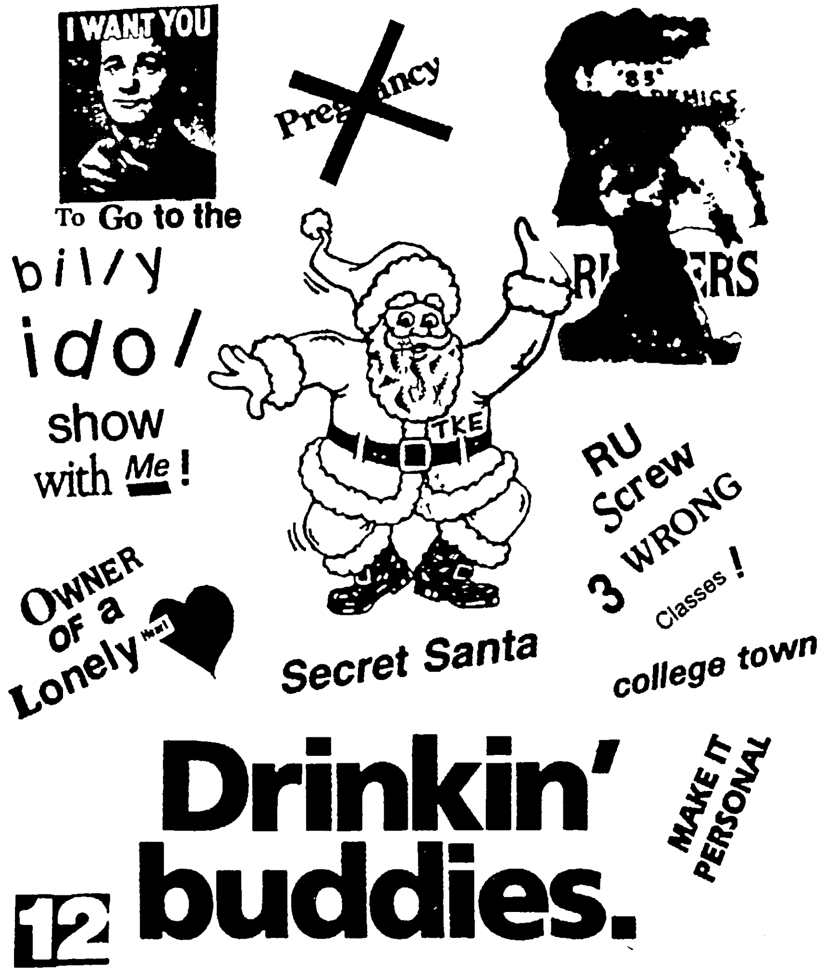


FIGURE 1

through popular music, the movies, TV, and certain mass-market magazines. The image also contains references to more local undergraduate culture at Rutgers. The Santa Claus stands for "Secret Santa," a favorite student festivity in the Rutgers dorms in the early 1980s (see chapter 3). "TKE" is the name of the student's fraternity. One of the two references to institutional Rutgers is to its least attractive feature in student opinion, to its bureaucratic inefficiency ("RU Screw"; "Three Wrong Classes!"). The other depicts "Rutgers," together with "'83' Academics," under a mushroom-shaped cloud.

This last image needs interpretation. It did not mean, the student told me a year later, that he had wanted to "blow away" academics during his first year in college. Rather, it depicted what he had feared might happen to his grades when he decided to pledge his fraternity as a freshman. But, he told me proudly, he had kept his "cum" up to a B+. We cannot say, therefore, that the academic side of college was irrelevant to this fun-loving freshman. But it was obviously not a central part of college in his imagery. It was necessary but peripheral, at least at this point in his young college career.

How typical was this college youth? One way to figure out actual undergraduate priorities was to examine a crucial set of student actions: how they budgeted their time in college. Both years in the dorms, I asked hundreds of students to fill out simple time reports: "Please tell me, as precisely as possible, what things you have done, and how long each has taken, since this time twenty-four hours ago." Most of the reports were made on weekdays in the middle of the semester. On these reports, 60 to 70 percent of the students suggested that they studied about two hours a day. Another 10 to 15 percent indicated harder academic work, up to six or seven hours a day—usually, but not always, students in the more difficult majors. And the rest, about a quarter of those who filled out the time reports, hardly studied at all on a day-to-day basis, but relied on frenetic cramming before exams.

How did the students spend the rest of their time in college? They did a surprising amount of sleeping, an average of just over eight hours a day. They spent about four hours a day in classes, on buses, or dealing with Rutgers bureaucracy. A quarter of them devoted small amounts of their remaining free time, one or two hours a day, to organized extracurricular activities, mostly to fraternities or sororities, less often to other student groups. One-eighth worked at jobs between one and four hours a day.

One-tenth engaged in intramural or personal athletics. And two-fifths mentioned small amounts of TV watching, less than the average for American children or adults.

The students' remaining free time was given over to friendly fun with peers, to the endless verbal banter by which maturing American youths polish their personalities all through adolescence, trying on new roles, discarding old ones, learning the amiable, flexible social skills that constitute American middle-class manners in the late twentieth century. Friendly fun was thus the bread and butter of college life as the undergraduates enjoyed it at Rutgers in the 1980s. It consisted almost entirely of spur-of-the-moment pleasures; with the exception of one type of campus organization (fraternities and sororities—see below), very little of it had to do with the older extracurriculum. Friendly fun included such easy pleasures as hanging out in a dorm lounge or a fraternity or a sorority, gossiping, wrestling and fooling around, going to dinner with friends, having a late-night pizza or a late-night chat, visiting other dorms, going out to a bar, and flirting and more serious erotic activities, usually with members of the opposite sex. And the students managed to find an impressive amount of time for such diversions in college. Across my entire sample, the average time spent on friendly fun on weekdays in the middle of the semester was a little over four hours a day.

On the face of it, then, the students were fooling around about twice as much as they were studying in college. But this is a deceptive conclusion. For from their point of view, college work also included going to classes, and the total of their classroom time plus their study time was about six hours a day. They also almost all worked more and played less around exams or when big papers or other projects were due. It was fairer to say instead that the students acted as if they assumed that academic work and friendly fun were, or ought to be, about equally important activities during one's undergraduate years.

In many ways, they also said that this was the case. Incoming freshmen usually had two goals for their first year in college: to do well in classes and to have fun (or to make friends, or to have a good social life). Older students looked back on college as either an even or a shifting mixture of work and fun. And students *in* college who were deviating from the ideal balance almost always knew that they were, and sounded defensive about it. Here are two female deviants, in papers written for me in 1986, confessing to the studying styles of a grind and a "blow-it-off," respectively:

> *The Grind:* I am a little too serious about my studies. . . . I often give up extracurricular activities to stay home and study . . . A few of my friends sent me a "personal" in a recent [student newspaper] which read: "What's more difficult—to get Jane Doe to stop flirting or [name of writer] to stop studying?" This is not to say that I am a "nerd" or some kind of Poindexter.[4] I have a variety of good friends, and I party as much as is feasible. . . . [But] I am the type of person who *has* to study. . . . This inner force or drive has been contained in me since childhood.

> *The Blow-it-off:* I am a female freshman, a once level-headed, driven, and, above all, studious girl [who in college] has become a loafer . . . totally preoccupied with my social life. . . . I spend the great majority of my day in the [dorm] lounge, resulting in my nickname; "lounge lizzette." . . . My new, urgent goal is to combine my old, intellectual self (study habits) with my new social self so I can be a happy, well-rounded person.

What was the happy, well-rounded student in the late twentieth century, by contrast? Someone who maintained a healthy balance between academics and college life, obviously. The two halves of college ought to be *complementary* ones in the opinion of modern college students. You came to college for the challenge, for the work, and to do your best in order to qualify for a good career later in life, most students assumed. College life was the play that made the work possible and that made college personally memorable.

68

AUTONOMY

Modern college life, like college life in the mid-nineteenth century, was also about autonomy, about experiencing college one's own way, independent of the influence and the intentions of adults. At first in the dorms, however, it was more difficult to figure out where the students were not autonomous than where they were. On initial impressions, they did not really seem to be oppressed or controlled by adults in any part of their lives.

Most of them had led peer-centered existences for years before arriving at college. In their public high schools and in their homes and families, they had become masters at avoiding the close scrutiny of adults, or at manipulating adult authority when they could not avoid it. Incoming freshmen women and men also typically said that their parents had voluntarily given them more freedom—later nighttime curfews, fewer questions about their private behavior—in their last few years at home, in anticipation of their leaving daily parental authority when they did go away to college.[5] Once they arrived at Rutgers, most of them really felt that they were on their own on a daily basis. And, in the dorms, the authority of the deans as mediated through the student preceptors did not exactly weigh heavily on their shoulders.

Looked at more carefully, however, the students actually lived in three different zones of relative autonomy and control in college in the 1980s. They were freest in their private lives. Rutgers, like other American colleges, had officially renounced in loco parentis authority over the personal conduct and moral behavior of its students in the late 1960s. Many of the other reforms that the protesting students of the sixties had tried to make in higher education had long since been rolled back by the late seventies and early eighties. But this fundamental change in college authority had endured for a generation.[6]

It had not been an uncontested change, however. Since the sixties, adult critics had regularly deplored the new arrangements, often imagining that good old American college life had now degenerated into a noisy, dirty, hedonistic world of sex and drugs.[7] And in the mid-1980s, with renewed public concern about teen alcoholism and, more recently, about a possible heterosexual AIDS epidemic, deans of students all over the country were thinking about new ways of intervening more directly in the personal lives of the students once again. At Rutgers in the late 1980s, however, the basic redefinition of undergraduate autonomy arrived at in the late sixties was still holding. In the dormitories, the authority of the deans stopped at the doors to the students' rooms.[8]

The students were least free, on the other hand, when it came to their formal education at Rutgers. Here, they had to submit in certain ways to adult authority—to professors, who gave them grades, their fundamental institutional pay. They had to sit passively in scheduled classes. They had to learn the material the professors thought was important. They often felt that they had to think like their professors to get a good grade, whether they agreed with them or not. They had to meet "requirements."

However, the students also had a degree of autonomy and of choice even in this least free side of college. College was not mandatory like high school. The undergraduates had chosen to come to college in the first

place, knowing that it would be full of academic work. In college, they did not have to get to know their professors on a personal basis; they usually could not get to know them at Rutgers even if they had wanted to. So faculty authorities were not breathing down their necks. General academic requirements at Rutgers in the mid-1980s were exceptionally loose and open-ended ones. Once the students chose majors, they often had a tighter, more demanding set of academic things they had to do. But at least they had chosen those requirements. And, despite the ideal balance of work and play outlined above, there were also many ways to get through college in the 1980s with very little academic work, if that was the way you chose to balance college life against probable academic success during your four years at Rutgers (see chapter 7).

Between their private lives, on the one hand, and academics on the other, lay a third, intermediate zone, an area where the authority of the dean of students was still intact after the liberalization of the late 1960s. The students literally walked into this zone in the dorms whenever they left the privacy of their rooms. Their dorm floors were supervised by student preceptors, at the bottom of the chain of deanly command. The dorms as a whole belonged to residence counselors, one link up the chain. Sets of dorms had full-time, adult area coordinators looking after them. Extracurricular organizations and student government were "developed" and "guided" by an associate dean with a staff of seven people, and there was an assistant dean who tried to "work with" the fraternities and sororities. A student guilty of cheating in class or a troublemaker in the dorms who could not be handled at lower levels of the system went through a judicial procedure run by yet another assistant dean. And so on up to the dean of students himself. And behind him stood the university police, wielding physical force.

How did the average student, outside a private room, experience the power of the deans at Rutgers in the 1980s? Most of the time, not at all. When they ruled India, the British used to marvel—and tremble—at having control of a nation of several hundred million peasants with a white ruling caste that numbered only in the thousands. The deans of students at Rutgers in the 1980s had the same fragile sense of their own power, for similar numerical reasons. Ultimately, about seven thousand residential students were held in check by a full-time professional staff that numbered twenty-seven individuals.[9] Like the British in India, the deans had their own loyal natives, their hundred or so preceptors, plus

other students whose "personal development" they were "fostering" by coopting them to their purposes. But they never knew just how loyal their natives were. For their part, just as Indian peasants rarely laid eyes on their white rulers, the students hardly ever saw a dean in the flesh outside of orientation and the odd official function. Consequently, most students led most of their college lives at Rutgers without thinking much about the deans at all.

But the students did know that the deans were there. And, as the residents of Hasbrouck Fourth discovered in 1984 when it came to public drinking and Secret Santa (see chapter 3), the deans could enforce their will even within the cozy student dorm-floor groups when they really chose to do so. The students usually resented deanly power when it was directly brought to bear on them. When this happened, they typically imagined the deans as far more powerful personages than they actually were—stereotypically, as small-minded, power-hungry, dictatorial autocrats. In the fall of 1984, when the deans were insisting that some of the more run-down fraternities clean up their acts, I listened as three fraternity brothers directly compared the dean of students of Rutgers College to "Dean Wormer," the villainous college authority in that modern college-life classic *Animal House.* In the spring of 1985, as another student on the floor I had been studying confessed to me that for some months she had believed I was a spy for the deans, she added, in self-defense (perhaps revealing a post-Watergate mentality): "But when you think about it, they *could* do anything they wanted to here. I mean, they could have all these rooms wired for sound. They could be listening in on us all the time!"

PRIVATE PLEASURES AND THE EXTRACURRICULUM

Late-nineteenth-century college life had been a group-oriented way of life. The students had claimed that college life did teach individualism, the "rugged individualism" of the era, the ability to impose one's character and one's will on other people. But it had done so through collective activities, through an extracurriculum of organized groups created and run entirely by the students: college classes, fraternities, glee clubs, campus newspapers, yearbooks, intramural and intercollegiate sports teams, and other student organizations. Not one college authority had had anything

to do with these extracurricular student groups for forty or fifty years. Despite the claims of college officials that the professors and good bourgeois families in college towns kept an eye on the private lives of the undergraduates, the students in most American colleges were actually almost entirely on their own outside the classroom before about 1900. Hence the lifelong love of early-twentieth-century alumni for the old extracurriculum. It really had belonged to them (see Moffatt 1985a, 1985b:38–99).

In the early twentieth century, however, American social psychologists invented the modern concept of adolescence (Gillis 1974:133–183; Kett 1977:215–244), and the leaders of American colleges borrowed from the students the notion that college was about adolescent development. They added whole new layers of staff to their burgeoning administrations: deans of students, directors of residence life, directors of student activities, athletic directors and coaches, musical directors, health specialists, psychological counselors, career counselors, and so on. They moved many of the undergraduates into newer college housing, into dormitories on the expanding campuses. The new deans of students proceeded to tame the undergraduates and college life in its original form. They made the extracurricular student their professional specialty. The nineteenth-century students' "college life" became the twentieth-century deans' "student life" (Moffatt 1985b:101–169; Horowitz 1987:118–150). As this occurred, the students progressively lost interest in the old extracurriculum they had created, and they revised their own notions of college life so that it still belonged to them. To do so, they had to move its essential pleasures closer and closer to their private lives—hence the dominance in the 1980s of informal, ad hoc forms of student fun.

Rutgers students in the 1980s gave considerably less energy to organized extracurricular groups than they did to their private pleasures. The Rutgers Student Activities Office was proud that there were 155 duly constituted student groups on the campus in 1987, not counting the fraternities and the sororities.[10] Most undergraduates probably had a formal affiliation with one or two of them. But, according to student time reports and the estimates of knowledgeable undergraduates, no more than one in ten of the students were really active in any of them. Freshmen often said that they intended to concentrate on their studies and their social life during their first year in college, and then possibly to "go out for something" in later years. In their accounts, an extracurricular involvement sounded like a duty that they felt might be good for them, somewhere between the fun of their private pleasures and the work of academics. Most students managed to avoid this duty entirely.[11]

The students did make distinctions among the organized extracurricular activities in the 1980s, however. The radio station was so focal to the interests of American youth culture that it was a prestigious involvement, even if the deans ultimately oversaw its operations. So, too, was the Concerts Committee of the Program Council, the student committee that selected musical performers on campus. Another respected student organization, however, the campus newspaper, had made itself independent of college oversight.[12] Student government, on the other hand, was a joke in the opinion of most students. The undergraduates voted for its representatives in the tiniest of turnouts. Student leaders must be lackeys of the administration, the students imagined. Even if they were not, they had no chance of accomplishing anything against the weight of deanly bureaucratic power. The only reason to become a student leader was to get to know some dean for reasons of your own, many students assumed.

The undergraduates had also invented intercollegiate athletics in the late nineteenth century. In the Original Football Game, in fact, played between Rutgers and Princeton in 1869, Rutgers undergraduates had legendarily been in on the very creation both of intercollegiate athletics and of American football (see Moffatt 1985b:30–31, 75–81). In the twentieth century, however, following nationwide trends, the alumni and a growing professional coaching staff had taken sports out of the hands of the students. Rutgers had more recently gone big time in intercollegiate sports. By the 1980s, most students in the dorms did not know any Rutgers varsity athletes personally. (Football players were carefully housed separately from other undergraduates.) Some students enjoyed intramural athletics. Others jogged or worked out. Most of them were as likely to be fans of nearby professional teams as of any of the college teams.

There was one exception to the students' generally casual interest in the organized extracurriculum in the late twentieth century, however, an exception that proved the rule. Rutgers students in the 1980s were strongly split in their opinions of the fraternities and the sororities. But for those of them who liked them, a quarter to a third of the students, the fraternities and sororities were going strong in the mid-1980s and getting stronger by the year. Why? Because, though the deans had attempted to "work with" the fraternities and sororities as much as with the rest of the extracurriculum, they had not really succeeded in penetrating and con-

trolling them despite seventy years of trying. In their ritual constitutions, the fraternities were intrinsically secret, and the intense peer solidarity created by their initiations could be extended into other aspects of their operations. The members also held their houses in private ownership; the deans did not have the same right to place preceptorlike supervisors inside them as they did in the dorms. And the fraternities often produced loyal alumni who could, as influential adults in the college, counteract deans or other authorities possibly unfriendly to the Greek community.

Thus, in the late twentieth century, the fraternities still gave undergraduates an opportunity for real autonomy in a group setting rather than only in their informal private lives. Such a zone of collective autonomy had not been available elsewhere in student culture at Rutgers or at other American colleges since about 1900. What fraternity and sorority members chose to do with this autonomy, however—unfortunately—was not likely to warm the hearts of many adults who believed in freedom and autonomy for college youths.[13]

INDIVIDUALISM, THE REAL WORLD, AND THE FRIENDLY SELF

71

The students' general preference for private pleasures over group involvements was also related to tendencies in the wider culture, to the shape of American individualism in the late twentieth century in particular. Real satisfaction and fulfillment, most middle-class Americans assume in the 1980s, are personal matters. You may choose to commit yourself to some larger social cause, but this is only one of many culturally legitimate choices you can make. There are other acceptable, more private paths to culturally meaningful fulfillment as well. And many of the students implicitly shared with their elders their sense that the American public world, which the students commonly referred to as "the *real* world," was as hopelessly complex, impersonal, and bureaucratized as, at a more local level, institutional Rutgers was.[14] If you were capable and well-educated, you might still carve out a satisfying career in some narrow, chosen part of it, especially in one of the professions. But you rarely assumed that you could affect it or change it in any fundamental way. So if you were sensible, you learned to base your values on more private expectations and satisfactions.

The recent American individualistic self, in other words, is, as many cultural critics have observed, a "privatized" self, an inward, psychological entity of personal beliefs, values, and feelings.[15] Unlike the rugged individualists of a century ago, Americans today do not feel that they can impose their will on the larger society. But the self still remains at the heart of their values, at the center of their felt authenticity. The true self desires or ought to desire autonomy, choice, and equal "natural" relationships with other selves, most Americans assume. And it does so by strictly sealing itself off from other known realities of the real world. As sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues have recently written: "We [Americans still] insist . . . on finding our true selves independent of any cultural or social influence . . . while [spending] much of our time navigating through immense bureaucratic structures . . . manipulating and being manipulated by others" (Bellah et al. 1985:150).

Rutgers undergraduates did not ignore the real world in conceptualizing the self, however. They simply saw it as a different place, requiring a different, more artificial social self. The true self had to disguise itself in the wider world, they believed. It had to wear masks. It had to play roles. It had to manipulate other people. Personal development of the sort that most students expected to accomplish in college was thus a complicated business. A well-socialized current American adult was neither inner-directed nor other-directed; she or he was both. Therefore, you had to come to know, or to construct, your "real" personal identity as you came of age. At the same time, you had to polish the practical skills of masking this same true self in the public world. You had to refine your ability to influence others if you wanted to get ahead in life.

Much of what the students did among themselves in the dorms, especially in the long talk sessions held in Undergraduate Cynical (see chapter 3), was related to the less authentic aspects of their social selves: joking, play, and ad hoc performances that taught them how to hustle and how to "operate" when necessary. Other parts of modern American college life, however, especially at more private levels with good friends and sometimes with lovers, had to do with the authentic, real self as the students thought of it in the 1980s.

And friendship as a relationship was about the self in the most fundamental way. Friendship had been the core relationship in undergraduate culture for two centuries. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the inten-

sities of college friendships in particular have been celebrated in American culture; in the mid-1980s, the movie *The Big Chill* was their most recent sentimentalization. With your college friends, middle-class Americans believed, you left childhood behind; you became a young adult. When you graduated from college, you might never have the time or the opportunity for so many real friendships again. I noticed the centrality of friendship from my first days in the Rutgers dorms in the late 1970s—and, occasionally, the students' anticipatory nostalgia for their college friendships while they were still in the midst of them.[16]

Though many incoming students had hometown friends at Rutgers, almost all of them believed that they would not benefit from higher education unless they also made new friends in college. And most of them did so very quickly. After a month at Rutgers, the average freshman already considered half a dozen new college acquaintances to be friends or close friends. Within two months, the average dorm resident named almost one-third of the other sixty residents on her or his dorm floor as friends or as close friends. In one longitudinal sample, freshmen and sophomores indicated that almost half of their five best friends in the world were friends they had made since they had come to college. The percentage of best college friends then rose to about three in five for juniors and seniors.[17] And most seniors believed that they would stay in touch with their best college friends for years to come after graduation.[18]

If anything, friendship was even more central in undergraduate culture in the 1980s than it had been in the past. For it was the only culturally unproblematic tie with another human being that still existed in the late twentieth century, given the fundamental assumptions of current American individualism strictly construed. All other social connections—the relationships of work, family, class, race, and ethnicity—were imposed on your true self from without (you did not choose what family you were born into, who you worked with, etc). Even love and sexual lust often chose you rather than you choosing them. (Love and lust can "overwhelm you," according to American folk psychology; see D'Andrade 1987). Your friends, on the other hand, were freely chosen, mutually chosen, egalitarian others whom you trusted with the secrets of your self. A true friend was, definitionally, someone who was close to your true self. Friendship was, in fact, simply the social side of the late-twentieth-century American individualistic self, which "naturally" desired to "relate" to freely chosen others.[19]

Friendship as the students thought of it actually had its own dilemmas and uncertainties, however.[20] Since it was about the true self, a definitionally inward entity, its ultimate proofs were entirely invisible. No external actions or rituals could constitute it. You and I are true friends if and only if both of us consider the other to be a true friend "in our hearts." And I am never entirely certain about what you really feel in your heart. The students therefore spent endless amounts of time discussing and thinking about the sincerity and authenticity of their own friendships and of those of other people whom they knew well.

Busting—aggressive mockery of one another—was important in the very definition of undergraduate friendship in the 1980s, as well as being an expression of its uncertainties.[21] A friend was someone who knew and accepted your real self. Polite talk was inauthentic behavior appropriate to the social self. Therefore, vulgar talk and mutual mockery were natural ways in which true friends related to one another. Busting was also the way in which the undergraduates tested who their true friends really were. "Only a real friend would let you bust on them; anyone else would get mad," as one student explained it to me in 1984.

Between the two spheres into which the students (like their elders) divided life, the private world of the true self and the real world of the manipulative social self, lay a third behavior and value, perhaps the central mediating value in American daily life in the 1980s. It is one that is so taken-for-granted by most Americans that it is virtually invisible as cultural behavior. And it is virtually undescribed in analyses of contemporary American culture. It is the late-twentieth-century American social value of "friend*li*ness."[22]

In the assumptions of most Americans, the contemporary self is neither self-contained nor exclusive in its affiliations. It is or it should be potentially open to other selves in its most authentic form; if you are a good, normal American human being in the 1980s, you should be ready, under certain unstated circumstances, to extend friendship to any other human being regardless of the artificial distinctions that divide people in the real world. To be otherwise is to be something other than a properly egalitarian American; it is to be "snobbish"; it is to "think you are better than other people." Americans know perfectly well that they cannot actually be friends with everyone, but in many daily contexts most of them still feel obliged to act as if they might be, to act friend*ly*. To act friend*ly* is to give regular abbreviated performances of the standard behaviors of real friendship—to

look pleased and happy when you meet someone, to put on the all-American friendly smile,"[23] to acknowledge the person you are meeting by name (preferably by the first name, shortened version), to make casual body contact, to greet the person with one of the two or three conventional queries about the state of their 'whole self' ("How are you?" "How's it goin'?" "What's new?").

The knowledge that "friendly" is often social etiquette, that it does not always mean that the person who is acting friendly wants or expects to be friends, can be a subtle matter. Foreigners, especially from closely related Western European cultures in which similar behavior is only produced under more genuinely intimate circumstances, have to learn to distinguish American friendliness from real friendship before they can function smoothly in the United States (see Varenne 1986a). Well-raised Americans, on the other hand, usually understand the distinction without thinking about it consciously. They know that the correct response to a friend*ly* How are you? is Fine or Not bad; only with a true friend do you perhaps sit down and talk for half an hour about how you are actually feeling at the moment. They know what five of my sophomore friends from Hasbrouck Fourth knew when, in 1985, I introduced them to the president of Rutgers University, an official so lofty that most Rutgers faculty members had never met him.

The president, in charge of a university comprising thirteen undergraduate colleges and twelve graduate schools at New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden, with a combined total of about forty-five thousand students, chose to act friendly to them for five or ten minutes: (Pointing) "There's the window to my office, over there in that next building. Stop in and visit me some time!" The sophomores knew enough not to believe him. They were impressed that he had had the good manners to act friend*ly*, however. And for several days, back in the dorms, they bragged about their classy encounter to their real friends.

Friendliness was the fundamental code of etiquette among the students in the 1980s, the one courtesy that they expected of each other in daily life. It had its rules. You were not friendly to everyone, but you ought to be friendly to anyone you had met more than once or twice. When the students complained about the impersonality of Rutgers bureaucrats, they often meant that they treated them brusquely instead of in a friendly fashion. And, among groups of students who knew one another personally, friendliness could be virtually mandatory.

YOUTH CULTURE AND COLLEGE CULTURE

In its nineteenth-century origins, college life was a specifically collegiate culture. And up through the middle of the twentieth century, less-privileged American youths knew it as the subculture of a college elite—of the more affluent undergraduates, typically from older WASP backgrounds. As Horowitz points out, college life did not just distinguish college students from the great masses of less-fortunate young women and men who did not attend college in those days. Many undergraduates were also excluded from it—from the "best" fraternities, for example. Horowitz calls these students "the outsiders," poorer undergraduates who were in college in order to achieve the middle-class status that the more-prosperous students who were enjoying college life took for granted. The outsiders tended to work hard at their studies and to view their professors with respect. Students in the college-life elite often stigmatized them as "grinds" (Horowitz 1987:56–81).

The original college-life culture slowly faded on American campuses during the twentieth century, however, and it virtually disappeared in the sea change that swept over American youth culture in the late 1960s. Between about 1964 and 1968, the casually well-dressed college man (and woman) suddenly became archaic at Rutgers and at other American colleges. All at once the students were part of a common, classless, internationally defined youth culture. And in their new tastes in clothing and

in music, they unmistakably stated their new antielitist sentiments. Blue jeans had once been working-class garb. Long hair and beards had distinguished cultural bohemians, as had casual drug use. Rock-and-roll music—supplanting collegiate musical tastes such as Peter, Paul, and Mary or "cool jazz"—was recently transformed black music. Army jackets were the clothing of poor draftees into the unpopular Vietnam War (Moffatt 1985b: 174–176, 221–234, 241–243).

Students in the mid-1980s no longer looked like students from the late 1960s. But in the way in which a general youth culture rather than a specifically collegiate one dominated their lives, and in the way in which this youth culture was available to everyone, not just to an elite, they were still very much the children of the sixties. The old extracurriculum was almost gone. The most fundamental student pleasures were the pleasures of other adolescents: friendship and erotic fun. The students' musical tastes came directly to them out of popular culture, and they recognized the sixties, whose music they now revered as "classic rock," as the *fons et origo* of music as they knew it.

The nearest thing to the older collegiate look in clothing among the students in the 1980s was "preppie," named, with obvious irony, for prep school students rather than for college students. Preppie was one step more formal than 'student casual': loafers rather than sneakers, slacks rather than blue jeans, and an Oxford shirt or an Izod shirt rather than a T-shirt or a sweatshirt. Undergraduates said that it was the look of student leaders and of academic straight-arrows. Other clothing fashions—"punk," "gay," "GQ,"[28] "jock"—had nothing to do with college; like music, fashions in clothes also originated in mass adolescent culture. College iconography was only incidentally visible on the walls of student rooms and on their clothing. Most Rutgers students guessed that no one in a crowd of strangers their own age would be able to guess that they were college students simply by looking at them.

There were some collegiate nuances in their otherwise mass-cultural-defined lives, however. Although the students did not show their college identity in any obvious way—that wouldn't be cool, they implied—most of them guessed that other members of their own generation would probably be able to identify them as college students after talking to them for a few minutes. They were likely to sound more intelligent, they thought. They were likely to "talk better." The college transformation was a subtle, inward one, the students implied, not an outer identity to be flashed like a

beacon. But almost all of them said that it was important to them that they were in college; privately, "college student" was an identity in which most of them took considerable pride.

Another type of collegiate nuance was exemplified by a category of popular music in the trend-defining periodical *Rolling Stone:* "college albums." College albums were the most sophisticated contemporary popular music—new wave, post–new wave, punk, hard core—the antithesis of Top 40. College albums received their biggest play on college radio stations. What marked them as collegiate was not some class-differentiated identity of their performers, however; they were not sung by buttoned-down preppies, for instance. It was their relatively difficult accessibility as art. Their actual content could be even raunchier than conventional popular music.

In *Campus Life,* Horowitz argues that American undergraduate culture in the 1980s is the product of two older student subcultures inherited internally on American campuses. Modern students are the "new insiders," she suggests—joyless workaholics like the old outsiders *and* nonintellectuals in their basic orientations toward higher education, like students in the old college-life elite (Horowitz 1987:263–288). As a summation of an average student attitude toward the life of the mind in American colleges in the late twentieth century, there is more than a grain of truth in Horowitz's typification (see chapter 7). She is dead wrong about the joylessness of the students, however. At Rutgers at least, in their own opinions at least, the students had lots of fun.

Moreover, though Horowitz is aware of the transformations in college youth culture that took place in the 1960s, she does not give enough weight to the impact that these changes have continued to have in the 1980s, of the degree to which contemporary popular youth culture continues to dominate the sensibilities of American undergraduates. The internal inheritance of campus traditions has not since the 1960s been the cultural force that she suggests it has been. Undergraduates at Rutgers—and elsewhere, on tangential evidence—only knew a few things about older college cultures. They knew that college was about adolescent autonomy. They knew that it was about fun and games: elaborate college pranks, and so on. They knew that they would find such typical college institutions as dormitories and fraternities on most campuses. Since the sixties, they had also expected to find political protesters and cultural

radicals in college. But the images of "college" that the average undergraduate carried around in her or his head were probably conditioned much more by contemporary American mass culture in its adolescent version than by any of the older student traditions indigenous to American colleges. A short list of popular adolescent movies about American college life in the late 1970s and mid-1980s, for example, would begin with the type specimen *Animal House,* progress through favorites such as *Fraternity Vacation, Spring Break, The Sure Thing, Revenge of the Nerds, Real Genius,* and *Soul Man,* and culminate in Rodney Dangerfield's recent *Back to School.*

Otherwise, almost everything in the private lives of students on American campuses in the 1980s was in fact a projection of contemporary late-adolescent culture *into* the particular institutions of youth that colleges now represented—places where everyone else was fairly intelligent, places where you were on your own with a considerable amount of free time, and places where adult authorities had a minimum knowledge of and impact on your private life.

COMING OF AGE

The age grading that characterized most of American childhood and adolescence in the 1980s first developed for small numbers of middle-class college students a century and a quarter ago (see Kett 1977:126–128). And with age grading, college students also formulated stereotypical notions of their own physical and mental maturation in college. Drawing on older images of the Ages of Man, late-nineteenth-century undergraduates pretended that they progressed from infancy to maturity during their four short years in higher education. One typical image from Rutgers in the 1880s showed the freshman as a precocious baby, the sophomore as a drunken youth, the junior as a suave ladies' man and the senior as a careworn, middle-aged bourgeois (Moffatt 1985b:57). And for two-thirds of a century, college class histories repeated the same conceits. Freshmen and sophomores were carefree, childish pranksters; juniors and seniors were more manly in body and in mind.

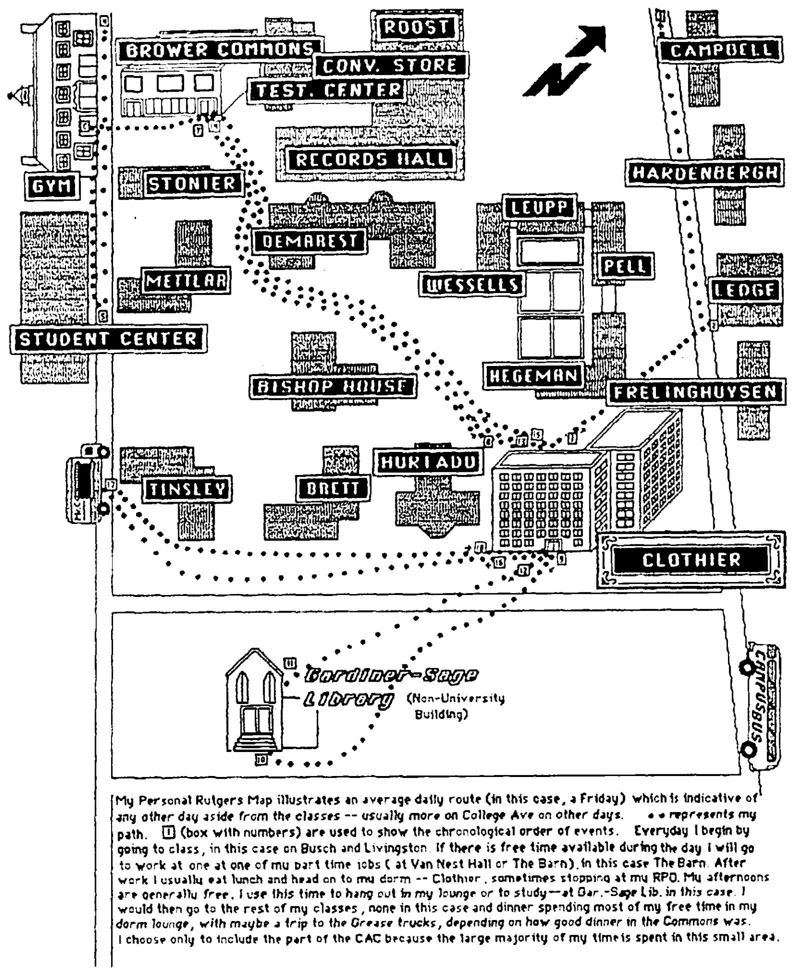
Rutgers students no longer drew such drawings or wrote such histories in the 1980s.[29] But they still had similar concepts of the typical stages of their personal development in college, which they still enacted with some

faithfulness. Freshmen were foolish and inexperienced. Sophomores were wild men (and women), the leading troublemakers in the dorms. Then, with a predictability that resembled that of some form of pupating insect, juniors almost always discovered that they had matured beyond the juvenilities of dorm culture. Dorm fun was now dorm foolishness. And the inescapable intimacies of collective living—everyone else knowing almost everything about you—had grown tiresome with time (for changing student images of college in early and later undergraduate years, see maps 2, 3, and 4).

Juniors usually decided that they were ready for something closer to an independent adult existence in the real world, usually an off-campus apartment. Seniors often wanted a maturer life-style still. Or they might typically consider themselves to be "burned out," victims of mild or severe cases of "senioritis," weary of college, apprehensive about what came next. Sexual maturity was no longer peculiar to college upperclassmen in the 1980s. Now it could characterize students in any of the four college classes. But the older you were, the more likely you were to be sexually active.

In student opinion, you were pushed through these stages of development in college in the 1980s by the various formal and informal learning experiences that characterized modern undergraduate college life. Students sometimes felt that college adults did have some impact on them in college. Four out of five students in a large class in 1987 said they thought that looking back twenty years after college they would remember a professor or two as people who had inspired them in college, who had made a real difference in what they were today as adults in the real world. But most of the time the students believed that they came of age in college thanks to what they learned among themselves on their own, student to student, or, paradoxically, thanks to what they learned from dealing with precisely the least personal, most uncaring sides of official Rutgers.

College from the students' point of view was a combination of academic and outside-the-classroom education. Academic learning gave you the credentials you needed to progress toward a good career, and perhaps it made you a broader, more knowledgeable person. Outside-the-classroom education, on the other hand, was often the greater influence on your personal development, many of the students believed. About half the same large class in 1987 said that academic and extracurricular education had been "different, but equally important" aspects of college learning for



MAP 2 / Personal Map of Rutgers, by a Freshman Male

In a class taught in 1986, undergraduates drew college as they knew it at the moment. This younger male's college is typically small in scale and centers on the dorms and the campus buildings immediately surrounding them. It is also clear from his map that this student is an unusually precise, academically oriented youth—the Gardiner-Sage Library is his favorite study spot—and a whiz on the computer.

MAP 3 / Personal Map of Rutgers, by a Senior Female

This older female, on the other hand, draws an upperclassman's image of college, a cute, apparently intentionally naive view centered on off-campus life. Her extracurricular pleasures include athletics, drinking, and relaxing in nature. When she uses the campus, she uses many different parts of it: the gym at Douglass, the computer center at Busch, and only two classrooms on the College Avenue Campus—where she does, despite off-campus distractions, still "get a real education."

MAP 4 / Personal Map of Rutgers, by a Sophomore Female

A more cosmopolitan upperclassman, old for a sophomore. She lives farther downtown, goes to a trendier bar (the Melody Cafe), has a sweet tooth, looks at the city more visually, and apparently bugs out regularly for New York. Her College Avenue Campus centers on one classroom, the Art Library, and one fraternity (Chi Phi, *top*).

them so far. About one in five of the remaining students considered academic learning more important than extracurricular learning, and about four in five made the opposite judgment. So, for about 40 percent of these students, the do-it-yourself side of college was the most significant educational experience. And for all but 10 percent, extracurricular learning had been at least half of what had contributed to their maturation so far in college.

One form of outside-the-classroom education in college, according to the students, resembled academic learning in content but not in context: the extracurricular intellectual learning that they did among themselves. Like the rest of college life as the students enjoyed it in the 1980s, most of this intellectual fun took place in private, in long talks about philosophy, morality, politics, and other serious interests, usually with friends. Some of it also took place due to the extracurricular programming available on campus, the students said, thanks to speakers, concerts, and other performances, thanks to an intellectual environment richer than anything they had typically known in their hometowns and high schools before college (see chapter 7).

The students sometimes referred to the rest of extracurricular learning in college as "social learning," as the things you had to know in order to be a competent adult in the real world as you would find it after graduation. And the students' college did prepare them for the real world as well, many of them firmly believed. Moreover, they added, a relatively cheap public college such as Rutgers often did a much better job of this than fancier private colleges were likely to do. You were, first of all, on your own in college, the students pointed out—much more so at Rutgers than at smaller, more personal colleges—and learning to take real responsibility for yourself helped you to grow up as an individual:

> Rutgers has helped me to learn what it is like to be on my own and take responsibility for my own actions. . . . The majority of college students find drinking to be of second nature . . . [but] I do not abuse the freedom obtained by living in college.—Freshman female[30]

> It is up to the individual. No one else at Rutgers cares how he does.—Sophomore male

The academic work was more difficult than it had been in high school. Your teachers no longer knew you personally or cared about you. Guidance counselors were not tracking your every move any longer. Your parents were not sure what you were doing on a daily basis. You had a more flexible schedule and more free time than you had ever had in high school—and more distractions all around you. It was not easy under these circumstances to remember the serious purposes for which you had probably come to college in the first place. Learning to balance college work against college play was one of the tougher challenges of your college years, the students maintained.

Second, college, and Rutgers in particular, was more like the real world than hometown and high school had been. A century ago the student apologists for college life had claimed that the rich associational activities of the undergraduates had prepared them to be movers and shakers after college, to build business organizations and other voluntary organizations in adult life. Now, in the 1980s, student associations were in eclipse in college, but so, too, were similar activities in the real world beyond the groves of Academe. Now the real world, especially at the professional and middle-management levels toward which most Rutgers graduates were headed, was already highly organized. Now it was an impersonal and bureaucratically complicated place. And now, conveniently, thanks to Rutgers' impersonality and bureaucratic complexity, college prepared you for this aspect of life after college. Smaller, more elite colleges were cloisters compared to Rutgers, the students commonly argued. Rutgers, on the other hand, got you ready for the real world with a vengeance:

> How did Rutgers teach me to deal with the real world? The answer, as ironic as it seems, is through the "RU Screw" . . . through that tortuous, roundabout way of making everything three times more difficult to accomplish, I learned the skills of persistence and determination which I would need for the rest of my days . . .—Junior female

Rutgers also mirrored the real world in the diversity of its undergraduate student body, the students often asserted. As a public institution, it brought students together from suburban hometowns and high schools that were often more homogeneous by class, by race, and by ethnic group. And here again, Rutgers resembled the real world much more than fancier colleges did:

> I have an old girlfriend from high school who now goes to Mt. Holyoke. Its all like "high-up Suzie Sorority" there. Like they're all just the *same.* My girlfriend

is sheltered from life. I have to deal with more. Because this is a state university, they have to let in all kinds of people. You just can't imagine the *friends* you have at a place like this!—Sophomore male, 1985

The actual ability of Rutgers students to deal with real cultural diversity as I observed it in the dorms was often very limited. Many students could not tolerate it at all, but sealed themselves into little friendship groups of people as much like themselves as they could find (see chapter 4). Virtually all the undergraduates believed in the value of diversity, however. For "diversity"—like "friendship" and "community" as they were ideologically defined—was simply one more entailment of late-twentieth-century American individualism (on "community," see chapter 3). What was the point of being an individualist if everyone and everything was the same? Real choice required a diverse universe within which to choose.

Diversity, moreover, was an easily shared value because it was almost empty of content. Real cultural diversity to an anthropologist might mean the difference between an American middle-class youth from a white ethnic background raised in northern New Jersey and a student who had recently arrived in the United States from a small city in south Asia. To an undergraduate, on the other hand, it might mean a roommate who liked mellow music while you yourself liked punk, a nerdy roommate while you yourself were a jock, or (somewhat more culturally) a friend whose third-generation white ethnic identity was different from yours—Italian versus Irish, for instance.

Nevertheless, undergraduate Rutgers was almost inevitably more diverse than anything most students had known to date, and was probably more diverse than the world in which most of the professors and other college adults lived.[31] At the very least, the students at Rutgers had to learn to get along with people they did not like for reasons of cultural differences. "Archie Bunker would never make it as a Rutgers student," one student commented on a paper in 1987. At best, the students sometimes did learn valuable things at Rutgers about themselves and the world from other students who were really different from themselves.

All in all I am very glad I came to Rutgers. Many people say it's too big. However, I really believe that is an advantage. There are so many different opportunities here . . . [Also,] being somewhat of a conservative, it was great being exposed to those "damn liberals."—Senior male

In high school, everyone in my classes was either Irish, Italian or Polish. Here, I go to classes with Asians, Indians, Blacks, Puerto Ricans and many others, from whom I get different viewpoints.—Senior male

Above all else, college is a breeding ground for interrelationships between students. If nothing else, a college student learns how to interact with his or her peers. The ability to form lasting relationships is of great value to the graduating adult. College is a step in the mental and psychological development of an individual.—Senior female

One attribute of mine . . . that was well developed through the years I spent at Rutgers . . . is that of being a true partier. . . .—Senior female

My social development [in college] seemed to help me as much, if not more, than my academic development into shaping me into what I am today. . . .
—Senior male

In the end, the students claimed, even the fun of college life was a learning experience. And with this claim, the dichotomy between formal education (work, learning) and college life (fun, relaxation) collapsed entirely for the students. In the end, you learned from everything that happened to you in college, the students asserted. And, anthropologically speaking, they were not far from wrong. For they did spend those four hours a day in informal friendly fun, working on their real identities through such activities and practicing the "bullshit" necessary to the well-tuned American social self in the real world in the late twentieth century. And they did devote about the same amount of imaginative and real energy to "learning to pick up girls or guys" as they did to seeking out "meaningful re*la*tionships" during their college years. All these personal skills would undoubtedly continue to be useful to them long after they graduated from college. In their refinement, in their opinion—as much as in the intellectual learning that they acquired in college—they came of age, they progressed toward something like adult maturity during their four years at Rutgers.[32]

But how and where did this all happen? How did particular students act out, negotiate, and modify these cultural conceptions and values at Rutgers in the 1980s? What sorts of variations were there among the somewhat variable late-adolescent youths who attended Rutgers? The best place to start looking for answers is back in the dorms.

80