

Why is “friend group” exclusivity our norm?

Exclusive cliques have become an unhealthy part of the social culture

by Darcie Kim

High school is an environment notoriously filled with social conflict and angst, one often characterized by a social pyramid of cliques with varying identities.

The song “Stick to the Status Quo” in “High School Musical” features a basketball player who professes his passion for baking and a brainiac who secretly loves to break dance, much to the horror and dismay of the student body.

While New Trier’s social environment can’t be as obviously defined by the cliché categories of jocks, stoners, and geeks, it indisputably relies on friend groups.

The problem with this doesn’t lie in the fact that New Trier has cliques. Rather, it’s in how obsessed people become with fitting into these friend groups and creating a culture of exclusivity.

Friend groups often provide the foundation for school dances or just for going out on the weekends. Distinctions between groups are made even more obvious by self-assigned groups names inspired by popular catchphrases or endearments.



“I’ve seen people who were not in friend groups try to get into specific ones as if [the groups] were sororities or fraternities. It can seem very hurtful if you don’t have a group that you are in or people know that you are a part of,” said senior Annie Halpin.

Senior Sarah Cortina attested to the exclusivity often associated with cliques. “I’ve heard stories of people being removed from friend groups, not being pushed out of them, or not being ‘allowed’ into the group. It’s so weird that even though you hang out with a group of people, that doesn’t mean you’re actually in their group.”

Halpin noted that there are

people who don’t prescribe to this culture of cliques. “I think you need to ‘fit in’ to be in a certain group and there are some groups where everyone looks and seems very similar. But I also think that if you don’t fit in with that, its probably because you don’t want to and then you wouldn’t want to be in a friend group of people who all ‘fit in’ at New Trier.”

Those who exist in a state of limbo, neither an explicit part of a friend group nor someone completely detached from one, are labeled as “floaters.”

“You can’t really just be a floater and have friends all over the place, everyone seems to like their groups

clear on who’s in and who’s out so they know who’s cool enough for them to talk to,” said an anonymous student.

What’s most concerning about this social culture is the effect it can have on students who want to fit in and be a part of a friend group.

The anonymous student explained that her experience with the social culture has been “all over the place.”

“I was in multiple friend groups before I found real friends. In the ‘tiers of New Trier’ being at the top means your friends can bully you and if you mess up you’re out. I’ve received death threats and been harassed

over parties and hookups. The social climate at New Trier actually made me leave school for a few months and I had to rehabilitate my mental health,” said an anonymous student.

The homogenized environment may also be a factor that contributes to the social tiers, and Halpin noticed that some cliques consist of certain ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses.

“I think New Trier is specifically hard to be at socially because of the lack of diversity. It’s really sad to see that the ‘top’ of the social hierarchy is all white and very similar looking. It’s hard because there’s such a specific image of what you should look like at New Trier,” said Halpin.

Senior Alex Kotaba said she thinks that, “New Trier is a bubble. From traveling a lot and seeing other people our age in different environments, I’ve really started to see just how exclusive New Trier is.”

Halpin’s perspective from the beginning of freshman year to now has changed to become less invested in friend groups or concerned with conforming to social statuses.

“I think that at the beginning of high school I was trying harder to be a part of [the culture of cliques]. Now that I don’t feel the need to participate in the social hierarchy of New Trier, I’m so much happier and I wish that I never cared about it.”

NT Sophomore Geography students opt to take AP test

Though Geography is not an AP class, curriculum prepares students for the test

by Alex Rubinstein

Some sophomores have started to study for the approaching AP tests, despite the fact that New Trier does not offer AP classes until junior year.

The AP geography test is particularly popular with sophomores since the geography class matches up with the AP Human Geography curriculum.

Geography Teacher Ian Duell said “We let the kids know upfront very early on in the year that the curriculum is very similar to the AP human geography curriculum and that we strongly encourage them to take the exam and the majority of the kids do because a lot of the material crosses over.”

While the geography class does not teach everything on the test, they provide supplemental readings and outside review to help prepare students for it.

Duell added that “We have a unique opportunity as teachers. We are not beholden to the exam like other AP courses are where it is an expectation that you teach the AP curriculum. If we do go off of the AP topics, which we all do, we feel confident that along with the textbook and supplemental readings that we give, and the material that we cover in class, that they will be well prepared for the exam.”

Although geography does cover the same material as AP geography classes do, the class is not centered around test review, and the majority of the preparation is done outside of class.

Sophomore Morgan Fagan said the class does not review specifically for the AP test because it’s not an AP class and not everyone in the class is taking the AP test.

“All the units we have covered and the one we are currently covering contains information we need to know for the AP test.”

The studying is mostly done at home, but teachers do host review sessions to help students prepare for the test.

Junior Beth Fisher said “My teacher gave out a bunch of study guides, practice questions, and key vocabulary for each unit. We mostly completed and studied these at home but our teacher was available to answer questions mostly outside of class time.”

For the majority of the sophomores, the geography test is their first AP test, and so many students choose to prepare for it.

Junior Camille Scrine said “I prepared for the test by making flashcards for every term, as well as looking through all of my in-class notes and assignments. I started preparing a few weeks in advance, and found that really helpful in limiting my stress level and avoiding last minute cramming.”

Some feel that sophomore year is too early to start AP testing, but there may be benefits to taking the AP geography test.

Duell said he thinks [the test] gives students the reality of what the AP program is like and what to expect from AP classes going forward.

“It gives students one more opportunity to potentially get college credit because some colleges will either give them credit, or they will waive a certain requirement.”

Director’s Project gives independence

Theater students given opportunity to direct their own production

by Hope Talbot

As May approaches, a select group involved in New Trier’s performing arts program is preparing for their individual shows to take the stage in the annual Student Directors Project Showcase.

Led by Theatre teacher Nina Lynn, the Director’s Project provides the opportunity for Theatre 4 students to culminate the skills they’ve developed since freshman year. Students take the initiative for their visions as directors--and for many this is their final farewell to high school fine arts.

For senior Ethan Burfield, the Directors Project allowed him to bring his inspiration of a contemporary piece to life.

“My show was ‘Collaboration’ by Kellie Powell. I found the show due to a monologue in the ‘Last Five Minutes.’ It’s about a girl confronting her old crush about a play they wrote and how it mirrors their real life relationship,” said Burfield.

Theatre 4 students began the proposal stage of the project, where they must pitch production ideas, in January. Directors then have the opportunity to choose who will play their characters by helping project sponsors select actors through an audition process. Directors’ visions are then presented throughout March in class and given the option to adapt their show based on peer and teacher feedback.

“The idea behind the project is that to be able to take all of those concepts and not only apply leadership to them but to be able to explain them to others demonstrates a very high level of learning. We’re really trying to support students finding their own voices as artists,



Chris Sciortino directed William Saroyan’s “Hello Out There” | Sciortino

specifically for them to be ‘citizen artists’ which is a term we use for using art to benefit a community,” said Lynn.

According to Lynn, the Directors Project has not only exposed students for decades to what the creative process of directing is really like, but it has also fostered dialogue on difficult real-life subjects that many students and community members face.

“When we ask students to select a play we want them to not chose it based on ‘oh this is really funny or sweet’ but to also think about the deeper access points behind it such as topics of grief and loss, sexual identity, self-harm, or even just being vulnerable,” said Lynn.

Lynn also commented that the shows often have different meanings for both the audience and cast members, so seeing a student take on what components of a script are emphasized is always interesting.

Directors are given a collection of items they can configure rather than building an individualized set pushing the actors to “become the show” by producing a certain environment with what they have.

“The most successful directors are people interested in really sharing the production. I love it when students are able to articulate what

they imagine the play to be, but also are flexible enough that when an actor has a unique take on the role that they can be collaborative as acting is a very human art form and individual expression of characters is really important,” said Lynn.

One of these “creative impulses” happened when one of Burfield’s actors pulled the cork on a champagne bottle prop, scaring audience members. Both teachers and directors seemed to agree that while rewarding, the project is often times both artistically and technically challenging.

For Burfield, scheduling times and making sure his actors were on the same page proved occasionally difficult, “The hardest part was trying to find rehearsal time. With one of my actors and I concurrently doing the directing project and the choir opera musical, there was a week stint where we couldn’t rehearse, which was hard.

The project was worth the pain for Burfield when he finally got to see his final production in class. “I’d say my production was much better than I initially envisioned it. My actors pulled their weight and made me really proud.”