How Friendships Are Established at Parkland College

Our group of three students conducted an ethnography of Parkland student life. We did personal interviews and carried out participant observation to study how individuals at Parkland College establish friendships. We all personally felt that we could relate to this topic and have observed it first hand, and know how difficult it can be. We concluded that, based on the information we collected, social organizations are the spaces that provide options to find real, true, and lasting friendship at Parkland College. Because of an assortment of issues within the school, individuals who weren’t involved in a student organization would be less probable of forming a long lasting bond or friendship.

For our project methods, we created standardized questions to ask our project individual participants in order for the results to be cohesive. Here are some examples of the questions we asked our interviewees:

- Is it hard to form a friendship at Parkland College?
- Do you find it easy or difficult to make friends?
- Did you already form a friendship in high school and continued the relationship at Parkland?
- Did you established a friendship by being involved in a sport? Or perhaps connecting because of a common interest or goal?
- Did you form one in a social organization?
- The friend you made at Parkland, do you hang out with them outside of school?

As we continued the interviews with the participants of our study we came to the realization that not everybody has the same perception of friendship as each person’s view point can vary to many degrees. Our group recorded three individual interviews in the library. One interviewee
was male while the other two were females. The first one was quite soft spoken and we didn’t get to much information from her, other than she was interested in people with similar interests. The second interviewee was much more outspoken, found it quite simple to meet people, and is currently involved with a social organization. The third found it much easier to make friends in a social group.

As students at Parkland College, each of us conducted participant observations. Another thing we took into account and held long discussions about was that being a student there is a need to have a sense of belonging within a social setting. We, of course, strive to find someone who gets us. However, we are limited by the circumstance within the academic setting on how we make friendships. I do recognize that living in Urbana, being a much older student, and growing up in Chicago I wouldn’t see high school friends at this community college and reconnect with them. I’m also aware that I’m an extrovert, humorously sarcastic, easy to get along with, and it can be hard for me to make friends because some individuals don’t take kindly to sarcasm. I feel that it’s important to recognize that I’m a current member of student social groups. Based upon my own personal experiences I’ve found it easier to make friends through social organizations than individually. I firmly believe that Parkland students have a hectic schedule between school work, classes, homework, and family which makes it difficult to connect with people. We as students don’t live together to have that deeper connection, like we would if we were engaged in a four year college. All of our group members involved attempted to be unbiased in the process of developing our research project, nor did we try and sway an opinion one way or another, but I also believe knowing our particular backgrounds is also useful to get a better picture of our research results.

From our interviews, we found that students at Parkland did have and form some
common interests and that some students didn’t find it hard to form a friendship. However when initiating a friendship you shouldn’t state you are looking for one. Friendships formed at Parkland are taken further and outside the college, however. This was because the friendships formed were within a community organization setting. Interviewees agreed that friendships at Parkland were created directly by joining a social organization which they were involved with. One was involved in Sigma Beta Kappa, while the other was connected with the speech team. The results of our research justified our hypothesis; it is difficult to make friendship at Parkland without affiliating yourself with a social organization to bring people together and collaborate, due to the diversity within the college and extremely hectic schedules.

Parkland College students have difficulty making friends within the school settings. This coincides with topics that we discussed in Anthropology 103 such as friendships, communication, kinship, and group identity. A majority of Parkland students have a tight knit relationship with their families. Mark Auslander’s perception of our culture shows contradictions between family and work stating, “In our social economic system, work involves productivity whereas family involves kinship and emotions like love. These two worlds are in structural opposition because they imply different ideas about purpose of life” (Podolefsky 46). Students have devoted relationships outside of Parkland on a daily basis with family, so as a result they are limited in their interactions with other students at school. This might explain why students join social organizations which is less like a place of work and more geared towards a consistent supportive interaction with other student or kinship with a commonly set of beliefs, including the fact that social organizations most commonly have rituals that unite a group. There’s an enormous amount of diversity within the students enrolled at Parkland as they come from different races, range of ages, countries, and social academic backgrounds, as well as
within the district and out of it. As described by Richard Sosis, “If people are linked by a common set of beliefs and a common set of ritual obligations, then they are more likely to cooperate with one another in ways that advance the good of the collective” (Podolefsky 85). Parkland students don’t share rituals such as religious ceremonies and there are few rituals used to unify the students. The difference in culture, diversity, and limited rituals at Parkland results in disagreements between students.

After utilizing the ethnography methods to further research the topic of how friendships are established at Parkland College, we concluded that it is difficult to make friends at Parkland, because the lack of unity within the school, diversity of the student body, and busy schedules. We also concluded that student who are involved in a group organization help to overcome the social instabilities and assist in building strong relationships. Otherwise due to the student hectic schedules it’s unlikely for friendship to be formed. Having tight relationships outside of school may also interfere with social interactions at Parkland. Finally, common rituals and goals can help to overcome these circumstances. There are numerous obstacles one must face on a daily basis when in a community college. The study of anthropology is a useful tool to better understand these obstacles because it helps to better understand society and social cultural structures more generally.

Bibliography