Article

Hyper-ideal Sociality

Rushing Activities as Extreme Rituals of Learning Professional Conduct

Mette My Madsen

University of Copenhagen

Abstract

Within the literature on ‘rushing rituals’ at institutions of higher education, there is a dominant focus on the creation of cohesion or *communitas* (Turner 1969) between students. This focus causes these rituals to be treated analytically as disjointed from the broader context of the institutional setting. Rushing is often treated as 1) something that figures purely on the level of students and 2) something extraordinary that is opposed to or the opposite of the ordinary life at institutions. Building on extensive fieldwork among students at the Danish Technical University, this article challenges the treatment of rushing as disjointed from the institutional setting. Through empirical examples, the article shows that students’ conduct in rushing is strongly informed by the professional ideals at educational institutions and it is argued that rushing activities can be understood as extreme enactments of these institutional ideals. Rushing activities are conceptualized as *rituals of hyper-ideal sociality*, that is, social scenarios where institutional ideals become grotesquely clear enactments that legitimize and teach students the social order of institutional life. Through a close analysis of rushing activities at the Danish Technical University the article exemplifies how activities such as partying, fancy dressing, games and competitions come to reflect the professional ideal of the institution and serve as ways to teach and rehearse specific preferable behaviour.

Keywords

rushing, higher education, extreme sociality, learning, hyper-ideal rituals

'If you want to know about DTU, then look into our rushing'

2nd semester engineering student
Danish Technical University, DTU

'Rushing activities' where freshman students are taken through a number of unusual activities by older students – such as drinking games, fancy dressing and various physical and mental challenges – are commonly understood as rites of passage or initiation rituals that allow the freshmen's passage from outsider to insider status in the context of their new educational institution (Schwartz and Merton 1968, Tierney 1992, Budhwa 1997, Newer 2001, 2004, Drought and Corsoro 2003, Keating et al. 2005, Forster 2008, Cimino 2011, Johnson 2011, Waldron et al. 2011, Helqvist 2011). Taking Turner's (1969) ritual theory as the analytical point of departure, the literature on rushing argues that activities are socially and materially extra-ordinary events where new students are separated from their old position as 'outsiders' and go through a liminal phase of unusual and hazarding activities in order to become members of the larger group of students, whether it is sports teams, fraternities, sororities, or university departments.

This literature agrees that students' rites of passage are events that should integrate the new students, boost a community feeling, and provide students with strong social and professional relations. But this literature also shows that rushing rituals are often highly problematic, interlaced with fierce hierarchies, humiliation, exclusive selection, and health endangering activities. The lapse between the expectations of what the ritual 'should' do and what is in fact happening during rushing, which is manifest in this literature, often causes scholars to deem the rushing activities as 'misunderstood' or 'failed' rituals (Johnson 2011, Newer 2001, Chimino 2011). But deeming rushing 'failed' does not explain why students find such activities so important that they continue to practice them generation after generation even though they are banned across many institutions and countries¹ and even though there is a long history of violent and deadly examples of rushing gone wrong worldwide.²

The present article seeks to broaden the understanding of rushing rituals at institutions of higher education, by proposing that activities are strongly connected to

¹ In France, for example, students' rushing rituals have been banned since 1998; in USA, 44 states have banned all kinds of humiliating student rituals, and at several universities in England all kinds of rushing of freshmen is banned.

² Examples of deaths caused by or related to students rushing rituals in media: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/feb/27/students.drugsandalcohol> - <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/4538565/Shocking-Cambridge-University-initiation-ceremonies-revealed.html> - <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4065448/Deadly-toll-depraved-drinking-rituals-Britain-s-universities-disturbing-initiations-students-downing-half-litre-vodka-just-20-minutes.html> -- <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/05/18-fraternity-members-charged-hazing-death-penn-state-student/> -- <http://www.philstar.com/news-feature/2014/07/10/1344288/hazing-deaths-philippines-recent-history>

broader socio-professional and institutional ideals. This makes rushing activities part of a meaningful and important learning process for students as they strive to achieve recognition of their new professional identities. This aspect of rushing has been overlooked because rushing is generally treated as something that figures purely on the level of students and as something extraordinary that is *opposed* to or *opposite* of the ordinary life that is expected at institutions (Foster 2008, Martin et al. 2011). I build my findings on material from one year of extensive fieldwork among students at The Danish Technical University (DTU) as well as four years of follow-up studies, interviews and focus groups at the same institution.³ Through detailed accounts of both the everyday conduct in class and the extraordinary rushing events, I show how rushing activities at DTU ritually mirrored the professional ideal of the institution and served as a way to teach and rehearse specific preferable behaviours.

Arguing that rushing activities are rituals of socio-professional and institutional ideals, I draw on anthropological and sociological theories of ritual practices as extreme enactments of underlying social structures and ideals. This means that I use ‘extreme’ not as a normative description of students’ extraordinary practices and conduct during rushing, but as an analytical framework to understand their meaning. I further conceptualize the extreme activities in rushing as rituals of *hyper-ideal sociality*, or else, as exaggerated, lived social scenarios of these ideals. Using an analytical framework of extremity offers a way to connect the extraordinary scenarios of rushing in a very direct way to the ordinary scenarios of institutional professional life. By casting rushing as a hyper and distorted version of the normal, I show how rushing activities can be understood as exaggerated enactments of professional ideals at the educational institution and thus serve as *professionalizing* rituals.

³ From 2013 to 2020, I have been involved in various ways with the students and the institution of DTU. However, in this article I draw in particular on material from 11 months of intensive field research conducted during 2013-14, during which I was embedded in the student population, first with freshman and then with tutors. The fieldwork was part of a large-scale interdisciplinary project called *Social Fabric/SensibleDTU* (now Copenhagen Social Network Studies) where researchers from eight disciplines, from 2013-2016 investigated a voluntary population of 800 freshmen at DTU using a diverse set of qualitative and quantitative data (for further details collaborations see Stopczynski 2014, Blok et al. 2017, Madsen et al. 2018b). Fieldwork included participating in all lectures, classes and social activities (for more details see Madsen 2018a). During the fieldwork I conducted 25 structured interviews, 5 focus groups, spend more than 1000 hours in the field, and had more than 100 structured conversations about rushing. I participated in 32 rushing activities following the freshmen (15 meetings and 17 party-activities with fancy costumes, games and competitions) including two trips of several days of duration. I also followed the interdisciplinary group of 250 tutors responsible for planning, arranging and executing rushing activities. I specifically followed a task-team of 10 tutors with whom I participated in 16 lengthy weekly meetings of planning and discussions as well as 16 weekly social activities and free trips of several days’ duration. I came into contact with almost all 250 students involved in the planning and execution of rushing activities as the team members were being divided into various teams for games and trips.

From Rushing as Students' Rituals to Rushing as Professionalizing Rituals

As scholars of learning and higher education have made clear, there is a strong correlation between students' extracurricular social activities and their ability to do well in their educational programme (Hanushek et al. 2003, Misfeldt 2010, Hartman and Hartman 2009, Herrmann et al. 2012, Barbary 2014, Rodriguez-Navarro et al. 2014, Baldwin et al. 2017). Activities like rushing can for example provide students with important friendships, networks, group affiliations, and a general feeling of belonging, all of which can prove essential for students' performance at their institution (Helqvist 2011, Dias and José Sá 2014).

Rushing is most often understood as rites of passage (van Gennep 1960) taking place in three phases: separation, transition and reincorporation. The extraordinary activities found in rushing rituals – such as frivolity, excessive partying, hazing, costume dressing and planned hardship – are most commonly analysed using Turner's (1969) specific conceptualization of the transitional phase as a 'betwixt and between' liminal space where neophytes have left an old position and do not yet belong to a new one. The temporary lack of positions creates what Turner describes as *communitas* – an all-levelling sociality of equality (Turner 1969, 98-99). He describes the liminal as a social space of radical difference in relation to the normal, a space where the normal social structures of society are abandoned, opposed or turned upside down. Though Turner describes the ritual as the opposite of the normal, he stresses that its purpose is to teach neophytes about the normal sociality and the underlying organizational principles and ideals of normal social form. Within this frame of the liminal as a lever for *communitas* and social teaching ground for new students, scholars have explored students' rushing rituals in a variety of ways.

Within health and psychology studies, rushing rituals have been shown to create deviant over-conformity to the dominant hierarchies and ideals of the immediate peer group of older students, as well as strong social and psychological ties between freshmen. As such, rushing serves the purpose of schooling the new students in skills and attitudes necessary to fit in with their new peer group (Waldron et al 2011, Waldron & Kowalski 2009) and to reduce the uncomfortable sensation of being a stranger in the university setting (Dias and José Sá 2012). Others have investigated how rushing rituals establish, teach and legitimize the ideals of the immediate student organization. Keating et al. (2005) find that there is a correlation between the kind of organization and the specificities in the rituals: rituals in sports teams have for instance more focus on physical hazards, while Greek-letter organizations have more focus on embarrassment and group deviance. They conclude that '...initiations serve as a training ground for group-relevant skills and attitudes' (Keating et al 2005,122). In university sports research, Johnson (2011) has made the point that new members of teams are treated to ritual hazing as a way to impose on them the values of physical strain and clear hierarchy.

Within higher education research, sociologists and anthropologists have connected rushing rituals to the larger societal and cultural context. Budhwa (1997) shows how fraternity rushing rituals (*pledging*) are exercises of painstakingly hierarchal performances of submission, domination, and cliques that mirror the everyday fraternity environment and masculine gender roles. Swartz and Merten (1967a) find that rituals at sororities at an upper-middle class high school are focused on hierarchy and individual physical appearance that reflect the dominant local socio-economic and cultural context (Schwartz and Merten 1967b). Tierney (1999) specifically criticizes rushing rituals for representing and promoting dominant culture, and as such, being culturally exclusive, effectively excluding students with minority backgrounds.

Though investigating rushing rituals in settings as diverse as sports teams (Johnson 2011), fraternities (Budhwa 1997), sororities (Schwartz&Merten 1967) or whole freshmen cohorts at university departments (Dias and José Sá 2012, Tierney 1999 and Helqvist 2011), these studies use Turner's framework to show that students' rituals – no matter how problematic, hazardous, or frivolous – teach lessons about the ideals and organization of the normal social context they are set in. I follow in the footsteps of the above-mentioned scholars as I strive to connect and explain behaviour in students' rituals through the social context within which these rituals take place. In particular, I follow those scholars who investigate the rushing of whole freshmen cohorts into higher education programs (Dias and José Sá, Tierney and Helqvist 2011). These rituals set themselves apart due to 1) their much larger crowd of participants than for example sports teams or Greek-letter organizations, 2) their ambition to socialize *all* freshmen who entered the program, and 3) their strong and often outspoken connection to the larger context of the educational institution. The scale and ambition of these cohort rushing rituals align them with classic ritual theory as they are (ideally) oriented towards a social transition of all participants and not merely concerned with limiting access to positions of power, such as a team or Greek-house membership. Though aligned with classic ritual theory, using Turner's framework of the ritual often causes a certain mismatch between theory and practice. Most noticeably is that students' rushing rituals do not seem to be enacted in opposition to normal sociality. In fact, the rituals in all the above-mentioned cases seem to be replicating the dominant social hierarchies and ideals at play. Secondly, a strong focus on cohesion or *communitas* in rushing rituals often leads to analysis centred on the students. Even when a larger cultural perspective is mobilized, it is related specifically to students. This does not help explain why rushing is such a central element in higher education. Neither does it account for the context of the educational institutions where rushing activities take place. In addition, the focus on cohesion or *communitas* renders analysis evaluative, and does not further explore the meaning of students' rituals. For example, Schwartz and Merten (1967a) deem the sorority rituals 'parodical' for their lack of *communitas*, Budhwa concludes that the fraternity ritual 'lacks the ability to

deliver' (Budhwa 1997, 28), and Johnson states that college sports teams' rituals 'prevent the expression of true *communitas*' (Johnson 2011, 201).⁴

In order to move beyond the evaluative perspective, incorporate the context of the educational institutions and point towards the importance of rushing rituals in higher education, I propose leaving the framework of Turner's theory of the 'opposite' sociality in rites of passage. Instead, I suggest that students' rituals, in a very direct way, *replicate* the socio-professional context at institutions. To make this shift in analysis, I draw on the argument by Hasse (2001, 2008a, 2008b) that in order to become recognized as professionals, new students must learn a 'code curriculum' of socio-professional codes of conduct concerning how to convey, inhabit, and express oneself as part of a specific profession (Hasse 2008a, 194). This curriculum is taught through administering recognition by imitating the behaviour of professional representatives such as older students and institutional representatives (teachers, administration and staff) (Hasse 2008a, 208). As such, students' behaviour is intrinsically intertwined with the socio-professional ideals and conduct at institutions.

Following Hasse's argument allows us to relate rushing rituals to their institutional context and explore this relationship: rushing is not necessarily to be regarded as antithetical to normal sociality but can be understood as part of a code curriculum, practicing what is preached at the institutions. In the next section, I proceed to lay out the theoretical framework that I will apply in analysing rushing at DTU.

Extreme Rituals and Hyper-ideal Sociality

When I argue that rushing rituals replicate the socio-professional ideals at institutions, it is crucial to emphasize that this is not meant in a one-to-one way. Sociality during rushing is not a simple mirror image of the normal sociality, neither is it to be copied in everyday life. No one, not even the most rushing-supportive of teachers or students, would consider students to be behaving as professionals by e.g., wearing costumes and being tipsy. Rather, rushing is best understood as a distorted mirror image, where certain features are exaggerated, but where we are dealing with a mirror image, nonetheless. To grasp the relation between normal and ritual conduct, I propose to analyse rushing as rituals of extreme exaggerations and hyper-enactments of the institutional socio-professional ideals. To do that, I firstly draw on a Durkheimian understanding of the ritual.

⁴ Why expect *communitas* to appear in all kinds of rites of passage? After all Turner uses *communitas* to describe a very specific form of liminal sociality that arrives from the very specific cultural setting of the Ndembu people in Zambia. Ndembu society is defined by structures of very strict positions and hierarchies whereas *communitas* is defined by Turner as the lack of these structures – that is to say, *communitas* is the Ndembu society turned upside down. On the basis of Turner's argument, it appears that *communitas* is not an automatic outcome of the liminal ritual, but rather one specific way that the liminal can come to be expressed. For example, in the case of a very liberal society, the opposite sociality during the liminal phase would probably not be *communitas* but rather something highly hierarchical and formalized. Failing to create *communitas* then, does not mean that the ritual has failed, but indicates that something else can be at stake in the relationship between the normal and ritual.

In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim theorizes religion and religious rituals (Durkheim 1912); in his conception of religion, rituals are intrinsically social and by extension, a worshipping of society – god and society are the same (Durkheim 1912, 201). As such, religion is an expression of the ideals and organizing principles of ordinary life (what Durkheim calls ‘morale’). Rituals are intense euphoric moments of celebration and manifestations of these ideals. They serve to confirm, teach and legitimize the ideals through excessive displays of symbolic action and material. For example, gathering as a group ritually confirms that you are a group. Showcasing physical artefacts that are symbolically connected to the group, ritually performs the group as materialized. Having visible symbols like different clothes shows that there is a social organization among different groups and manifests this diversity. Every ritual action and object are to be understood as material expressions of social principle and ideals of the people that practice the ritual (Durkheim in Lessa & Vogt 1979, 34). Due to their scale and intense concentration of symbolic action and material expressions, rituals become exaggerated celebrations of the existing sociality. Normal life and ritual mirror each-other but they do so through different mediums (e.g., materiality) and at different intensities and scales of exposure.

For Durkheim, ritual is an *extreme* hording, gathering, and exposure of social ideals and organization. A Durkheimian reading of the action and materiality of rituals enables us to shift our understanding of rushing activities away from being ‘rituals of opposition’ to being ‘rituals of extreme exaggeration’. I shall explore this kind of extreme exaggeration further by drawing on the work of Maurice Bloch (1989).

Bloch argues that ritual is the tool for institutionalizing and justifying privileges by establishing specific (imaginary) realities through its practice. To exemplify this, he shows how highly formalized speech and singing in rituals only occur in societies that are structured around formalized and hierarchical positions of authority (Bloch 1989, 18). He argues that the use of highly formalized speech and singing by an exclusive group of performers draws formalization, hierarchy and structure to the level of a universal and divine principle of order, establishing the positions and privileges in society as inarguably true. The normal and the ritual are both direct enactments of the same ideals of organizing principles and moral differentiations (Bloch 1989, 25), thus the ritual exposes and emphasizes the social organizational ideals by over-doing these in a performance. The ritual performance is not only symbolic but has the capacity to momentarily transcend symbolism and become a reality, a pure and truly (divine) lived form of these ideals. By transcending into a pure form of the ideal, the ritual uses its power to establish the ideal as something outside of human actors, something inarguable.

Returning to rushing, this frame of ritual practice allows us to understand its activities not only as intensified gatherings of symbolic behaviour and artefacts but as the social ideal overdone to the extent of becoming a real lived form of the ideal. I will further elaborate on the power of ritual to establish an exaggerated ideal

reality by drawing on Morten Petersen's (2007) work on shamanic rituals of the Darhad people in Mongolia.

Pedersen explains that in order to communicate with the spirits the shaman must be able to realize and interact with the underlying organization of the world, with its bundled and intertwined relations. Consequently, the shamanic rituals are centred around turning the underlying organization visible so that it becomes possible to interact with it. This is done in particular with the help of a cloak composed entirely of messy, intertwined, knotted pieces of string and material that is altered and added to every time the shaman enacts a new relation. Pedersen argues that this cloak becomes a 'hyper-surface', a momentary exposure and realization of the inside of the world with which and within which it is possible to interact. According to Pedersen, the ritual becomes a durational 'hyper-version' of that which organizes normal sociality. A hyper-version that is realized, materialized and socially interactable (Pedersen 2007, 160).

What Pedersen thus shows is that ritual not only establishes and legitimizes ideals as (imaginary) realities, but it also realizes ideals, actualizes them as hyper-realities that are both materially and socially present and interactable. In this way, the ritual also has the power to turn ideals into momentary hyper-lived social forms. I draw on this notion of the ritual as I conceptualize rushing as hyper-ideal sociality and show how students at DTU during rushing momentarily came to live the socio-professional ideal in extreme, excessively exaggerated ways.

Finding out what informs the students' ritual behaviour thus translates into tracing from the ritual extreme the 'normal' socio-professional ideals of institutions and the reverse – tracing from the professional ideals the meanings of the ritual extreme. This is what I will proceed to do now by describing how the socio-professional ideal at DTU was understood and conducted in normal classroom activities, consequently relating this to the students' rushing practices.

Being a Good Engineer

At DTU the ideal of the 'good engineer' is centred around the engineer as someone with a solid foundation in technical engineering skills such as mathematics, but importantly also with the ability to work with diverse partners, be an openminded team-worker, and appreciate diversity in both skills and attitudes as a lever for innovation and progress. On the DTU website, it was (and is) emphasized that the institution strives to have an 'entrepreneurial spirit' that is established through multiple collaboration points and diverse partnerships spanning across hierarchical, disciplinary, social and cultural differences:

Through collaboration, our staff and students reach out to the world and work across disciplines to create value, welfare, and

growth by developing technologies that work in a globalized world, transcending social and cultural differences.⁵

Indeed, diverse collaborations are regarded as the very foundations for innovative entrepreneurship and are therefore essential to the mastery of being a ‘good engineer.’ This ideal is not only embodied in the statement on the official website but was repeatedly presented to the students by many important actors representing the institution on different occasions. Entering the campus on the official ‘day of introduction’ to DTU, a day full of speeches and socializing, the President of DTU (*rektor*) expressed this sentiment strongly in the final punch line of his speech to the approximately 1000 new students: *‘Alone you may travel fast but its only together we can go far!’*. On the very first day that new students set foot on campus, he was underscoring that not only were technical skills of importance but more so the individual’s ability to work together with others and act as a team to reach a higher level of entrepreneurship and good engineering. Likewise, within the first week of the semester the Head of Studies took 40 minutes in a lecture to illustrate and explain through a slide presentation how the new students should understand the role and conduct of the engineer. The engineer was presented as a central coordinating figure in a constellation of diverse partners. It was stressed by the Head of Studies that *‘The engineer never stands alone but always relies on the ability to work within a team of diverse partners.’* The figure of the engineer was attributed skills such as collaboration, making diverse partners come together, and the ability to exchange ideas. Being successful and professional as an engineer was again emphasized narratively as relying as much on personal skills as it did on teamwork skills and team-partner diversity.

The engineer is at the center with diverse partners as overlapping bubbles (authors replication).

The ideal of the good engineer was not only a strong narrative, but also a strong organizing principle in the classes. This was clear in all the classes in the first semester of the student cohort I followed in 2013, which were set up in ways that

⁵ <https://www.dtu.dk/english/about/profile> (accessed 25/1/21)

would *nudge* students to work together or seek collaborative help from other students with different specializations or approaches. For example, after math lectures students would typically have 2 hours for working on exercises. Though there were no requirements for collaboration during these hours, they were officially named ‘group-calculation-sessions’ (*gruppuregning*) and had a form that urged students to mingle with each other. The mingling was initiated by requiring that students do their calculations on paper without the use of any computer programs, for the first several weeks in the first semester. The math-assignments were handed in every week but only the results of the pages long calculations would be given to the teacher. In these classes students would get very little help from teachers and assisting teachers. Because the calculation process was crucial to get the result right, students would compare each other’s calculations in pursuit of the right result. This caused students to mingle with each other and bargain, borrow and get inspired by each other’s approaches and problem-solving skills. This kind of working together around calculations also happened outside of the scheduled time as students met up in groups to prepare and finish things they did not manage during class. Also, for classes in building construction and modelling, assignments were officially organized as group projects with group hand-ins and exams. Working together was further emphasized in class due to an insufficient number of computers for running the construction simulation program. As the teacher emphasized, the insufficient number of computers was only good for the students because it nudged them ‘*to cross their social boundaries by sharing and working together with the person next to them*’.

As a result of the organization and nudging, students would effectively work together in all classes during the first semester. The official organization of group hand-ins and exams, the naming of classes such as ‘group-calculation-sessions’, and the nudging of students to seek sparring partners and inspiration in each other, all led to specific ways of behaving being valued as professional skills. Being social in a mingling, exchanging and collaborative way, while appreciating diversity and constructively forming relations across skills and social boundaries, was being cast as an advantage for students and pointed towards the institutional ideal of the professional engineer. Interestingly, both students and institutional representatives attributed the very possibility of the mingling and collaborative work-form in class specifically to the rushing activities that students participated in.

The connection between rushing and professionalism was established on an institutional level right from the beginning of semester. At the introductory event where the President of DTU spoke about socio-professional ideals of engineering, the Bachelor Dean, in his speech stressed both the elite ambition of the institution and the need for students to build large, diverse social networks. He formulated this connection between the professional and the social by proclaiming to the new students: ‘*Here you will learn to work hard and party hard!*’, thus linking work and party together as mutually beneficial and important to students’ education. Furthermore, the program and execution of rushing activities enjoyed support from the institution of DTU both financially and morally, as the institution was supporting

older students to take responsibility for freshman students' integration and for the social environment at DTU. Consider the amount of time students spend on rushing compared to the hours offered in the educational program; freshman students of the cohort I followed in 2013 spent 351 hours sitting in lectures and classes in their first semester. In comparison, they spent an average of 294 hours participating in rushing activities. The older students I followed in 2014 spent around 350 hours in one semester preparing rushing activities for the freshmen. The number of hours spent sitting in class was almost proportionally matched by the time spent on planning and executing rushing activities such as partying, dressing up in costumes, playing games and competitions like bar crawls, and all this with the encouragement and approval of the institution. Indeed, teachers would speak warmly and with appreciative humour of students who showed signs of mild exhaustion from rushing events and they would in a confidential tone tell new students about particularly funny incidents in class caused by rushing exhaustion. This added to the understanding that being social in the way that was connected to the rushing activities was good for students. As long as they followed class and did well, the socially active students were regarded positively by teachers.

This connection was also strong among the students themselves. The link between rushing activities and socio-professional conduct consistently came up in *every interview and conversation* with students concerning the meaning or purpose of rushing activities. As I will give more detail in the following sections, let me here briefly exemplify the kind of connections students would verbalize in interviews and conversations.

'When we party together, we meet each other. We get to mix and mingle with each other and you really need that! You need other people in order to become a good engineer. You especially need people that are not like yourself – that maybe you would not normally hang out with. Those are people you meet through rushing'

(Lisa, a first-year student, 2014)

'The feeling of safety, that feeling you need in order to work together, it does not come around by itself. We need these activities. We need to be foolish together and be put in situations where we have to talk to each other.'

(Kenneth, a third semester student and active in planning rushing activities, 2016)

Being a good engineer – conducting oneself socially in the way that was valued at the institution – was intricately intertwined with the rushing activities. Indeed, both institutional representatives and students themselves regarded the students' socio-professional abilities in class as a direct result of the rushing activities. As

Hasse (2008a) argues, the behaviour of students is informed by institutional ideals of professionalism that are presented to them by professional representatives. Through recognition students learn what acts are valued as aligned with professional ideals (Hasse 2008a, 208). When institutional representatives as well as older students valued and recognized the rushing activities as pointing towards a professional ideal, rushing became a template for learning the right behaviour. So much so that the kind of sociality the rushing activities promoted was regarded as *professionalizing* behaviour, giving the students the skills needed to conduct themselves as good engineers. With this in mind, the next section will proceed to show that part of the connection between rushing and the professional ideal of the good engineer lies in the immense work that goes into the preparation and execution rushing.

Orchestrating Rushing Events

The scale of rushing at DTU reveals its importance; it was held for the entire cohort of 1000 freshmen and was not just a single event, but a full semester of weekly activities. To tutor the freshmen through rushing there was a team of approximately 300 older students. Before the start of the semester, the tutors would randomly divide all the freshmen into smaller groups of 10 and assign them to different tutors; one group specific to their line of study and one interdisciplinary group. These formed core-groups that would run throughout the semester and be active in several rushing events, such as games, competitions and so forth. But they were not the only groups freshmen and tutors were placed into in connection to rushing – tutors and freshmen were assigned to so many groups that they would, by the end of their first semester have a large network with an average of 200-300 acquaintances whom they would have talked to or been teamed up with. Many rushing events involved all 1000 new students and 300 tutors. Some events would however have over 2000 participants as some parties or bar-crawls were open for all students at DTU. The sheer number of participants made these events ambitious and large scale planning events. Only about half of the time students spent on rushing was spent in the actual events, the rest was spent on preparatory work.

The tutors made programs with complete timetables and detailed accounts of activities and sub-activities for all events. Games and competitions during events like bar crawls, drinking competitions, or eating cake through a tennis racket, were in no way treated in a careless or mundane manner, but were discussed, evaluated and planned in great detail by task forces of tutors. In order to orchestrate the new students' participation during events, the 300 tutors would have weekly meetings in small task forces of 10 throughout a period of 12 months (6 months for preparation and 6 for managing rushing activities and events). Here they would discuss, plan, evaluate, store meeting minutes, revisit experiences from previous years and make sub-divisions of labour; often, planning details were written down in action-plans of more than 100 pages. This left a huge task of administering practical matters – such as where and when to buy and store alcohol, who to be responsible in case of an emergency, or mapping the activity venue – and technical matters like how to assemble the sound systems, order beer or maintain the atmosphere

during events. Indeed, this system was so elaborate that the 300 tutors had to collaborate on a large scale with other groups of older students who voluntarily took responsibility for technical matters, running bars, security during events, monitoring the action plans, maintaining relative order and more.

Total group of 300 tutors for managing 6 months of rushing. Different costumes distinguish different interdisciplinary taskforces (2014, with permission from Polyteknisk Forening).

The freshmen and their participation in the rushing events was also monitored and organized by the tutors. Tutors led weekly meetings with the freshman core groups, where they discussed participation in the week's rushing event. This was done by detailed rounds of discussion, expectations alignment and planning. For example, before participating in a costume event, the group would agree to a costume theme and discuss what to wear, then the tutor would coordinate with all other tutors ensuring that no two groups would dress in the same theme. Groups would discuss how elaborately members wished to dress up – would someone wear a full costume and someone else only wear a bit? – and they might go shopping for it together or borrow things from other students in the tutor's large network. Then they might agree to cook food together before the event, and discuss what to cook, who would shop, how to divide expenses, and where they would be cooking and eating. They might also agree to have drinks together before the event and again they would discuss what to drink, who would buy, how to pay, would they do drinking-games, and how would it be acceptable for all participants to drink, perhaps some would like to get drunk and others just tipsy and so on.

In the rushing events, students would always be offered by their tutors to participate in groups, sometimes this was their recurring core groups, sometimes new groups mixed from their line of study, or it could also be interdisciplinary. There would always be tutors assigned to the groups who would see to the group members attitudes and the groups' internal coordination as well as participation in the

larger event. The following section will elaborate on the significance of these preparations in relation to the institutional ideal.

Detailed accounts of the rushing activity Rustur (2014, authors photo).

Practicing What is Preached

As is evident from the amount of planning and concern for enabling the right kind of sociality described above, rushing events were not about hurling freshmen through partying, drinking or playing obscene games. To the contrary, they were meticulously arranged events, socially and materially orchestrated and choreographed between freshmen and tutors. Rushing at DTU involved a very large system – constructed, organized, built and evaluated, which consisted of practical and technical solutions, bringing students into diverse and interdisciplinary workforces, solving tasks through teamwork, and networking across social and disciplinary boundaries. Within the large system of rushing the idealised conduct of professionalism became a template for how to build and orchestrate events. The students were in this regard practicing the socio-professional ideal that was preached to them at the institution. They were building live scenarios that enabled them to behave in alignment with the ideal by solving tasks in a most elaborate practical-technical manner and by repeatedly placing themselves and each other in social scenarios of mingling, valuing diversity, being team workers and never standing alone. Following Bloch's argument that exaggerated formalization can establish the ideal as 'more than its actors' we might understand the students' preparations for rushing events as a performed formalization of the socio-professional ideal that lends the students' rituals the power of a universally right way of thinking and doing things. Through the meticulous preparation and orchestration of events students behave as one community acting towards the same end goal, through the same way of thinking. As such, the formalization of preparations for rushing events worked to further legitimize the socio-professional ideal by making it into a

(very specific version of) reality. Let us now move to the more spectacular parts of rushing, the drinking, costumes, competitions and partying.

Rushing Events

With the exception of the exam preparations in November, there would be a rushing event every week during the fall semester. Some events were exclusive to freshmen and tutors, some were exclusive to the lines of study, and some were open to all students at DTU. Some events lasted several days, but most were single day events beginning in the afternoon and lasting until early morning. Every week, tutors, new students, and numerous other older students meticulously planned out and prepared for the event in the manner I described in the above section. Though diverse in theme and set-up, events ran through the same pattern every time, as I will now describe.

Author posing in costumes from rushing events. Each costume marks an activity and an assigned group (2015, author's photos).

Activities most often involved students (old and new, but especially new) being divided into groups that would dress up in diverse costumes and attend events in teams. Events were also very often centered around or included some form of competition and games. This could be an elaborate bar-crawl-race on campus or a large campus costume-parade-race with hundreds or thousands of student participants. It could be a beer-pong competition, beer-bowling or team based drinking competition. Or it could be a series of special competitions or tasks that tutors had planned for the freshmen, like orientation-runs with tasks such as feeding each other blindfolded, eating cake through a tennis racket or transporting the group over a distance without touching the ground. Though centered around competitions and games, there would from the beginning of events also be loud music and consumption of alcohol. Even though events started out as centered around competitions and games they would transform over their duration of hours into intensive partying. As the event went on, the many groups of students that kept together in the beginning of the event-forming game or competition teams in clearly recognizable team costumes, would become progressively drunk and mingle with each other in an increasingly chaotic way. At some point during the event, compe-

titions or games were completely overthrown by the partying and resulted in no winners or definitive results. As the event continued into the night (this also holds true for events of several days of duration) there would be an increased frenzy of dancing, singing, jumping, shouting, bumping into each other, hooking up, talking and mingling – and finally, *public* puking.⁶ Outside, attention would typically be drawn to puking by making a specific pose known as ‘the dragon’. Inside, students would hand out or carry see-through plastic bags for puking. When exposed, students would deliberately look at and comment on the puke and in a humorous and appreciative way recall the event that caused it.

What we can see from the above is that moving from the highly formalized preparations to the actual events of rushing, students’ behaviour changed dramatically. However, as I will show in the next section, the socio-professional ideal of how to be a good engineer would still run through the enactments of rushing events and lend meaning to the seeming chaos.

See-through plastic-bag of vomit at an event (2015, author's photo)

Rushing the Ideal

Following a Durkheimian reading of the rushing events, they stand out as vast gatherings and showcases of symbolic action and material. During preparations for these events students accumulate material symbols of ‘diversity’ and ‘team-ness’ as they plan, coordinate and gather their costumes. The teams stress their ‘team-ness’ by wearing the same costume. At the same time tutors would ensure that no two teams were alike, securing a maximum of visual and symbolic diversity for the event. Likewise, competitions or games set the frame of both ‘diversity’ and ‘team-ness’. As teams compete, they are cast as separate units creating a sen-

⁶ Puke would be public, yet carefully placed in a way that it would not be a nuisance to others – for example outside it would be placed visibly but out of the way so that no one would step in it (see Madsen 2018).

sation of many distinctly diverse groups. By performing as teams, they become the diverse teams that they are dressed up to be. At the same time, competing in teams, and not as individuals, places emphasis on the importance of and reliance on team-members. Consequently, when the students start performing the ritual event – the competitions and games – they move into a ritual social form that stresses the idealized conduct of being a good engineer. When actively performing the competitions, they do not only showcase vast symbolic material and action of the ideal – they enact it at a large scale. Following Bloch, the rituals' symbolic actions and material (e.g., doing things in teams and being dressed up in diverse costumes) can be said to reach a point where symbolism surpasses itself and stops being symbolic. Doing the event in costumes specific teams enables students to ritually enact 'diversity' and 'team-ness' and by doing it on a large scale this idealized conduct momentarily becomes a reality greater than any one student. It is, so to speak, physically and mentally surrounding the students wherever they look. In a similar way to the preparations for events described earlier, this acting out of teams and diversity is at first done in a formalized way and has a rather static social form (Bloch 1989). The students are at this point in the ritual, following the rules of the game or competition and the structure of teams as they move through tasks collaborating with their team-members to solve or overcome them. Later, the ritual moves into another social form which becomes the ultimate ritual culmination point of the rushing event.

Using the effects of alcohol, particularly the incapability of keeping focus, the structure of competitions/games and teams gradually becomes overthrown, paving the way for a seemingly chaotic movement and mingling of students. Following Pedersen (2007), we can understand this last form in the rushing ritual as the time when the symbolism as well as the formalization of the ideal (e.g., doing things in teams and being dressed up in diverse costumes) reaches a point where it surpasses itself and stops being both formalized and symbolic. Instead, the ideal becomes lived as a hyper-social form of reality. For example, the 'team-ness' and exercise of 'getting along' was further enabled when competitions and games were overthrown. Without a climax of winners and losers, the rivalry between groups turned into a focus on the collaboration and team spirit that groups had exercised in their striving. Indeed, the whole competition or game became like a big collaborative project where everyone had worked together to 'do games' – not to win but to join in an activity together. Also, when competitions and groups dissolved, students' movements became less structured and escalated into forming a large body of mingling bodies. All dressed in particular yet diverse outfits, the students came to form one large 'team of diverse partners.' In other words, when students overthrew the formalization of events, they came to ritually establish a sociality of intensively exaggerated 'mingling and collaboration between diverse partners' – not only a reality of the ideal, but a hyper-social enactment of it. Gradually, the ritual performance sped up, exaggerated to an extreme as everything became both more particular and more intertwined. More particular as dressed up individuals broke out from groups and mingled amongst each other, and more intertwined as everyone became one big team of diverse partners. The public puking only added to

the scenario: the very insides of students turned outside to join the public corpus of the team. As students would cram together in close physical proximity, bump into each other, hug, dance, talk and interrupt each other, sing, vomit and generally attribute to the inferno of noise, movement and visual diversity of costumes, the ritual sociality highly stressed the institutional socio-professional ideal of diversity and ‘team-ness’.

Rushing event with interdisciplinary teams engaging in competitions and games (2013, With permission from Polyteknisk Forening)

Conclusion: Rushing as Hyper-ideal Sociality

This article has shown how there can be strong connections between institutional socio-professional ideals and the way rushing rituals are conducted. This has been argued by tracing through the institutional rhetoric, classroom activity and rushing, the distinctly valued ways of conduct that made up the socio-professional ideal at DTU.

The concept of *hyper-ideal sociality* was advanced to describe the ritual culmination points wherein idealized conduct became extreme, overly materialized and actualized. As ways of learning professional ideals, things such as dressing in costume, vomiting and being drunk can become such powerful extremes teaching and legitimizing specific ways of being a professional. This is important as it means that rushing activities are not only a matter concerning students. Worldwide educational institutions experience problems connected to rushing, such as severe hazing, physical harm, high drop-out rates for minority students or discriminating social environments. But no matter how frivolous rushing activities may seem they are deeply intertwined with institutional, professional culture. This points towards the critical impact that institutions have on students' sociality. In the cases where rushing rituals become problematic or hazardous the ambition to change the behaviour might well require further investigation and change of the institutional culture. This might be initiated by regarding rushing activities as hyper-ideal ritu-

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