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# Screw your roommate from the sidelines

by Samantha Herron · February 18, 2016

If Valentine’s Day is a celebration of romantic love and affection, then Screw Your Roommate — a celebration of the awkward, the flirtatious, the unknown, the sexually tense — is an apt precursor. Most relationships,

particularly at Swarthmore, are necessarily preceded by an uncomfortable, wishy-washy dance of talking to pseudo-strangers and hoping a cute one will invite you to a meal at Sharples. I like to think that Screw Your Roommate just speeds up that process and adds silly costumes.

Screw Your Roommate, as it currently exists, is an annual February event in which individuals scheme to set up their friends or roommates on a blind date in Sharples. The dates are costumed as pairs (think: Salt and Pepper, Romeo and Juliet, Kohlberg and Science Center) and instructed to arrive at Sharples at the same time in order to locate their other half. Once accomplished, the couple circles our too-small dining hall to find some open seats while each person waves sheepishly at their friends or the roommate responsible. Awkward small talk ensues, and both parties slowly realize that, despite their high hopes for the evening and beyond, their coupling will likely not extend past the end of the meal. A fabled few individuals will be lucky enough to screw their Screw as

the evening proceeds, and a tiny population might go on to (gasp!) date for real, but Screw dates, for the most part, end as nothing more than a good time, albeit one platonic and vaguely uncomfortable. Despite the clever double entendre of the event's title, participants are rarely ever "screwed" in either meaning of the word – neither intentionally set up on a disastrously awful date, nor likely to have sex with their partner. So it goes.

Screw, I am told, used to involve more theatrics. Pairs would not merely be costumed and clueless, but also asked to perform certain mildly humiliating tasks or to find their sweetie around campus via clues before heading to dinner. Screw was then followed by a dance party, which was no doubt equal parts amazing and uncomfortable, given that everyone must have been collectively trying to navigate the social obligations of how best to engage their Screw date post-Sharples. What happened to these traditions, I do not know, but we are left with a still satisfying, still weird echo of what used to be a much grander event. Perhaps the popularity

of social media and Tinder has sapped some of the allure of public humiliation and blind dates? Regardless, Screw stands as one of the most popular Swarthmore traditions, or at the very least, one of the most popular Swarthmore traditions mentioned on campus tours.

Last year I was too antsy to take part, and this year I'm happily taken, so I've only participated in Screw from the sidelines — always the Screwer, never the Screwee. As a lover of gossip, public embarrassment, and spectacle sports, I am all too willing to sit and watch the event's organized chaos. This year, I arrived early to dinner in order to snag a coveted circle table in the big room, armed with guac, chips, and a bottle of wine. Having helped to screw some of my friends, I found myself very invested in the evening's goings on. After lamenting my lack of binoculars, I settled in with my back facing the wall to optimize my view of the Big Room, and waited for the couples to trickle in.

Sharples was packed. The Screw turnout was really beyond Sharples' occupant capacity, although I can't speak on the Screwee to observer ratio. In any event, I had ample opportunity for sleuthing. The scene is akin to some Halloween singles mixer, as strangers flirt clumsily with each other while simultaneously scanning the room to see who managed to snag a hottie for dinner. Despite Screw's notoriously low level of long term success, the room was filled with skittish Swatties with crossed fingers, hoping to match up with A Special Someone.

I did a few laps through Sharples throughout the night, playing detective as I eyed the Screw dates of people of note. I spied on my laundry list of benign campus crushes, on the I-Didn't-Know-They-Were queers, on the Oh-I-Thought-You-Were queers, on the frat boys, on ex-hook ups, on former hallmates and classmates. I watched someone spot their Screw date with visible, vocal disappointment. I watched someone else locate their Screw date with excited disbelief. Emotions were high as ever, and I was thankful to be a watchful, if tipsy, voyeur.

Eventually, the Sharples Screw crowd began to dwindle. The time had come for me to abandon my crow's nest/spy cave/observation deck and move on to less creepy pursuits. I hoped vaguely that later on I'd spot some Screw Couples of Note that had managed to stick together for the night's parties, but unsurprisingly, I did not. Swarthmore's campus, so far as I could tell, had returned to business as usual after the few hours of the whimsical, if ungainly, event that is Screw Your Roommate.

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**Samantha Herron**