

Andover Bans Grinding and Inappropriate Dress at Dances To Alleviate Discomfort of Students and Faculty

Through the windows of Nathan Hale House, Alex Kim '17 and Indiana Sobol '17 can hear music blaring from the Pine Knoll dance just outside. It is September 28, one week after their segregated Junior-only dance. The Pine Knoll dance is their first opportunity to experience a dance with all four classes of Andover students. Kim and Sobol decide to join the crowd of dancing people.

Around them, students appear to be minding their own business and enjoying themselves. Some are socializing on the outskirts of the crowd, some are jumping up and down and fist pumping to the music and others are dancing seductively to Macklemore's "Thrift Shop." From the outside, the dance looks inviting. Once they join, however, Kim and Sobol are quickly made to feel uncomfortable by a group of upperclassmen.

In an interview with *The Phillipian*, Sobol said, "At the Pine Knoll dance, there was a group of upperclassmen, and they went around and circled all the Juniors and were grinding on them. It was kind of intimidating because they were all a lot bigger than us, and they were much older."

"I wouldn't say that it was a really negative experience, but it was a little uncomfortable and funny at the same time," said Kim.

When asked, several other female underclassmen echoed Kim and Sobol's discomfort at school dances.

"There have been some times [in] Junior year when creepy upperclassmen follow you around during a dance and you make awkward eye contact that can be really pressuring," said Alexa Rodriguez-Pagano '16.

Not everyone agrees that the environment at school dances is problematic. When asked if she felt uncomfortable with what people around her at dances were doing, Janet Chen '17 said, "Not at all. If you don't want to do it, you have the option of saying 'no,' and you can walk away. There are people going crazy, but I just moved away."

Shortly after the Pine Knoll dance, Paul Murphy, Dean of Students and Residential Life, sent out an email to the student body explicitly stating that grinding would no longer be permitted at school dances. Murphy denied that the new policy was in response to Andover's "hook-up culture," but acknowledged that this culture was a problem.

"[T]hough I'm not psyched about the hook-up culture, the hook-up culture is a far more complex issue than what goes on at dances. They are probably linked, but it is not even close to the

reason why we sent this clarification out,” Murphy said in an interview with The Phillipian.

Christopher Capano, Director of Student Activities, said, “I think when students feel that they need to dress or dance a certain way, it keeps people from coming to dances, because they don’t want to have to conform to something that is uncomfortable to them. If coming to a dance means you have to wear too little clothing, you might choose to not go to the dance as opposed to coming to the dance with too much clothing and being not cool,” said Capano in an interview with The Phillipian.

Billy Casagrande ’15 said, “[The policy change] is disappointing for people who don’t abuse it because it can be healthy or good, but because some people abuse it and they harass people, the people who don’t mean bad are punished. Although [the policy change] is necessary, it is also kind of unfair to the people who are respectful.”

The uncomfortable situation that chaperones may be put in at dances was another reason for the clarification, according to Murphy.

“We clarified [the policy] mostly because the chaperones didn’t like looking at it and they kept asking me, ‘Am I supposed to stop that?’” said Murphy. “It was one of those things where the clarification went out based on adult discomfort and it turned out that there was quite a bit of student discomfort.”

Thomas Cone, Instructor in Biology, said the initial cause of his discomfort was the music being too loud for his liking, but he soon realized that “some students danced in ways that made others uncomfortable, but I didn’t know when to interfere and when to not.”

“I think the dress policy being clarified might make it a little bit easier for chaperones to know what is and isn’t okay,” said Capano. “I think before, it was a little more up to the judgement of the chaperone, which was hard on us, because we didn’t want to make the wrong decision, and now we have a much straighter list of what is okay and what isn’t okay.”

Murphy said, “There is this moment where the adults have to say that this is not okay, and if we keep doing it this way, we won’t get anyone to chaperone. Then you have to get rid of dances, and nobody wants that.”

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