

BNOC culture – how we've drunk our own Kool-aid

Does anyone actually care about all these BNOCs?



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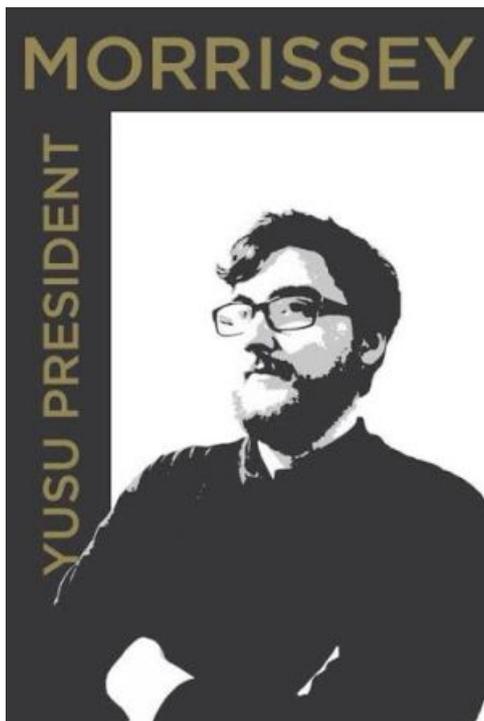


Image: Ciaran Morrissey

Just because you're from Derwent doesn't mean you have to lick the arses of the college Big Names On Campus. Nor should you feel obliged to, regardless of the college you come from. Although BNOCs are thought of as part and parcel of university culture, there are convincing reasons why we should seriously assess the position of the BNOC on campus, just as we have lad culture.

We far too easily dismiss what would otherwise be seen as inexcusable behaviour as "just the way BNOCs are" like a parent pardoning children.

Some BNOCs may be equally spoiled, self-entitled and conceited, but unlike children, the existence of the appellation reflects on us as the student population. For all the talk about university being a place for vigilant criticism and debate, we let BNOCs off the hook: a large dent in our critical faculties.

It's difficult to diagnose the problem because it is impossible to identify a group of JCRC members, student politics or sports groups as BNOCs without grossly generalising and implicating people who genuinely care about serving their communities or are passionate about their societies.

People in any position of power – be it through popularity or formal authority – need to constantly appraise their intentions and involvement in social groups. Just as we have recognised the toxicity of lad culture, the BNOC equivalent is similarly, but more subtly, pernicious. In an age where the cult of the

celebrity is so pervasive, it's easy to forget to critique the people - or institutions - we see as representative of the values we hold.

But placing anyone or anything in a position of power, regardless of the situation, dangerously overemphasises particular qualities and often excuses behaviour that needs to be criticised objectively.

It's no longer good enough to dislike them or meet any BNOC news with an eye roll. For all our distaste for BNOC culture we may profess, we are the ones that perpetuate its self-fulfilling prophecy.

From articles (admittedly written by student journalists) offering purportedly official lists of BNOCs on campus or worse, advice on how to become one yourself, we create the narratives that spawn them.

People become BNOCs when we confer status onto them. When I couldn't identify someone a friend pointed out to me while walking to campus one day, my friend asked if I was even from Derwent.

The tired absurdity of BNOC culture is that we don't even like the majority of them. But if tearing down the myth of the Big Name On Campus was as easy as simply choosing to extricate ourselves from the phenomenon, there wouldn't be so many infesting universities with elitism, inside jokes and aggressive self-promotion.

The BNOC social phenomenon paradoxically publicises their parties and gatherings while stressing their exclusivity, as if to tell us, "Look at all the fun you aren't invited to." Perhaps the inability to remove ourselves completely is indicative of an addiction to the cult of the celebrity - and a hope to one day become one.



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