STUDENT STEREOTYPING OF GREEK AFFILIATED CLOTHING

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discover if Greek and non-Greek students associate certain stereotypes with individuals wearing Greek affiliated clothing. This study will analyze student stereotyping of Greek affiliated clothing. Currently researchers have studied student perceptions in regards to both positive and negative stereotyping of Greek and non-Greek students (Wells, 2008; Biernat, 1996; McGlone & Aronson, 2007). These scholars argue that there are both harmful and constructive stereotypes associated with social organizations on college campuses. This proposed study will expand upon current research by surveying Greek and non-Greek college-aged, (18-23 years old) undergraduate students. Ultimately, I will explore if there are stereotypes surrounding Greek affiliated clothing, and discover how these perceptions were formed.
INTRODUCTION

For decades Greek life has been a prominent aspect of college life. Many social sororities and fraternities hold high standards in their constitutions, however these ideals can be lost on a day-to-day basis (Reed, 2010). Pi Beta Phi is a women’s social fraternity whose mission is “to promote friendship, develop women of intellect and integrity, cultivate leadership potential and enrich lives through community service” (Pi Beta Phi Fraternity, 2012). At Cornell University a member of this social organization sent out a seven-page dress code for members to follow (D’Addario, 2010). This list contains specific details of what each sister is required to wear regarding; shirts, pants, shoes, dresses, accessories, and makeup (“Cornell Sorority”, 2010). The author of this list states how she will be completing “dress checks” at each event (D’Addario, 2010). What happened to the traditional ideals of intellect and integrity? The principles of leadership, friendship, intellect, and community service that this organization was founded upon became lost behind the emphasis of physical appearance. This Greek organization transformed their traditional ideals to values that are congruent with the stereotypical portrayal of sororities in media.

Media can be a reflection of how sororities and fraternities have lost sight of their values (Glass, 2012). Whether it is appearance or behavior media represents the stereotypical expectations for sorority and fraternity members. Media is an outlet that can form negative stereotypes surrounding Greek life. These negative perceptions can be formed through sorority/fraternity member’s actions while wearing Greek affiliated clothing (Glass, 2012). In the movie The House Bunny (2008) many of the sorority members wore dresses, sweaters, pearls, and were expected to have their hair and makeup done.
The more exposed we are to the stereotypical perceptions of an organization the more likely we are to internalize and confirm these stereotypes (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). The sorority members in *The House Bunny* (2008) were depicted in stereotypical sorority attire (khakis, polos, pearls, sweaters, etc). As a result audience members have the potential to form stereotypical notions of what sorority members should wear. In regards to stereotyping, public opinion has the ability to influence how movie producers portray these women in stereotypical ways (Anastasio, Rose, & Chapman, 2005).

Media has the power to change an individual’s entire perspective and identifies Greek life as a social hierarchy that highlights the importance of appearance while straying from their traditional ideals. Films like *The House Bunny* (2008) and television shows like *Greek* (2007) describe sororities and fraternities as stereotypical and judgmental (Glass, 2012). Media has the potential to sway public opinion regarding what is stereotypically acceptable for a sorority member to look like and wear.

**STUDENT STEREOTYPING**

This study will analyze student stereotyping of Greek affiliated clothing. My research is ground in the *social identity theory* according to Em Griffin (2009) and *stereotyping* according to Julia T. Wood (2010). Student stereotyping is vital to study because many students can feel victimized by the stereotypes associated with their group. A Greek life coordinator at American University stated that certain sorority/fraternity members create negative stereotypes through their reckless actions when wearing Greek affiliated clothing (Glass, 2012). Instances such as this can cause harmful stereotypes and may keep people from joining a Greek organization. The
The purpose of this study is to discover if Greek and non-Greek students associate certain stereotypes with individuals wearing Greek affiliated clothing.

**THEORETICAL GROUNDING**

Griffin (2009) describes social identity theory in regards to how people define who they are by communicating as members of a group or an individual (p. 391). Trajfel (as cited in Warber, Taylor, & Makstaller, 2011) argues that vital qualities of a person’s identity originate from their group membership (p. 15). In other words people form their sense of self through group associations and membership (Warber et al., 2011). For example, in college many students join sororities and fraternities, identifying as a representative for their organization. Ultimately these individuals are defining who they are through their group membership. When a sorority/fraternity member wears Greek affiliated clothing they are representative of their group-identity.

*Convergence* is the concept that people have an underlying desire for social approval. People want to be liked and accepted. For example, college students tend to join clubs, social organizations, or sports teams because they feel embraced by that group. *Initial orientation* is when meeting a new person you focus on them as either an individual identity or as a member of a group (Griffin, 2009, p. 392) In other words when meeting an individual who is wearing sorority or fraternity clothing they are representative of their organization. This can cause individuals to associate stereotypes with the person wearing Greek attire.

A stereotype is defined as a predictive generality assigned to an individual or situation. Stereotypes are based on our own observations between people and social situations (Wood, 2010, p. 71). We form stereotypes based upon the people and interactions we have witnessed.
Stereotyping is an important aspect of the perception process, which influences how we evaluate others and ourselves (Wood, 2007).

**PERCEPTIONS OF GREEK AFFILIATED CLOTHING**

This section will explore three important aspects related to the issue of student stereotyping of Greek affiliated clothing: positive and negative stereotypes, impact of media, and group/individual identity.

**STEREOTYPICALLY GREEK: BENEFICIAL OR DAMAGING?**

Researchers have studied student perceptions in regards to both positive and negative stereotyping of Greek and non-Greek students (Wells, 2008; Biernat, Green, & Vescio, 1996; McGlone & Aronson, 2007). These scholars argue that there are both harmful and constructive stereotypes associated with social organizations on college campuses.

According to a quantitative study conducted by Wells (2008), students who were members of social Greek or service organizations saw their own group in a more optimistic way. This researcher investigated Greek and non- Greek students’ attitudes towards different social groups, academic groups, and the members associated with these organizations. Wells (2008) demonstrates how stereotyping and student prejudices toward social organizations are often unconscious.

Generally, Wells (2008) describes how students who are members of a sorority or fraternity accept that there are stereotypes formed around Greek life, however; they distance these stereotypes from their own group. Students involved in Greek life think much higher of their own social organization. In conclusion Wells (2008) surveyed both Greek and non-Greek
students discovering that there are stereotypes surrounding social organizations and these perceptions can be unconscious.

Biernat, Green, and Vescio (1996) conducted a quantitative study examining students’ attitudes towards social fraternities and sororities. The researcher found that the Greek and non-Greek, undergraduate students who were surveyed accepted the undesirable stereotypes (judgmental, shallow, snobby) associated with Greek life, but applied them to other Greek organizations besides their own (Biernat et al., 1996). Although the participants recognized the undesirable stereotypes they distanced them from their own social group. In regards to clothing, sorority and fraternity members may feel the need to dress in a particular way because they are being stereotyped in that way. However, these members may not be conscious of the stereotypes that are associated with their own Greek affiliated clothing (Biernat et al., 1996).

In congruence with Biernat, Green, and Vescio’s (1996) research, a quantitative study performed by McGlone and Arson (2007) found that female students may do worse in certain subjects (math, science, business) because they believe the negative stereotypes associated with women not being as proficient in these subjects (p. 128). These researchers surveyed both male and female undergraduate students exploring negative and positive stereotypes associated with gender. Ultimately, McGlone and Arson (2007) conclude that women have potential to be affected by the stereotype that women are not as skilled in math related subjects, resulting in them doing worse in these areas.

These findings can be linked back to the concept that sorority members dress in stereotypical ways based on the belief that they should look a certain way. In regards to Greek life stereotyping is an issue that members of sororities and fraternities have potential to face. This
problem can cause members to act or dress a certain way according to the stereotype associated with their own group (McGlone & Aronson, 2007).

IDENTITY: WHO AM I, WHO ARE WE?

Researchers Warber, Taylor, and Makstaller (2011) have explored the impact of group-identity based on individual interactions. These scholars argue that students can stereotype an entire group or Greek organization in a detrimental way because of interactions with a single member of that group. For example, an individual may have stereotypical notions about a sorority/fraternity member wearing Greek affiliated clothing based on their interactions with one member of that group (Warber et al., 2011).

Furthermore, a quantitative research study of Greek and non-Greek students, conducted by Warber et al (2011), explores how non-Greek students perceive fraternities and sororities based on interactions with members of these organizations. Researchers concluded that non-members, who thought a single member of an organization was less dependable, would perceive the entire sorority or fraternity as untrustworthy.

According to these researchers it is apparent that non-Greek students stereotype members of social organizations based on a lack of communication or interaction (Warber et al., 2011). These stereotypes can be formed through media and the stereotypical portrayal of how sorority and fraternity members should look and behave (Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt, & Carlson, 2009).

THE POWER OF MEDIA

Scholars have studied the impact of media on public perception and group membership (Anastasio et al., 2005; Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt, & Carlson, 2009). These researchers argue that media has the ability to form and reinforce audience members perceptions and stereotypes.
Media is a powerful tool, which has the power to influence and shape public opinion in both pessimistic and constructive ways. Anastasio, Rose, and Chapman (2005) conducted a quantitative study of college students to discern if there was a direct correlation between social identity and media. These researchers concluded how the media depicts a situation can affect the opinion of audience members. In other words, how media illustrates sorority/fraternity members can affect the perceptions of the audience members and can reinforce stereotypical assumptions of Greek organizations (Anastasio et al., 2005).

Similarly, researchers Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt, and Carlson (2009) conducted a survey of undergraduate students analyzing media's role in shaping public opinion. *Cultivation theory* explains that television viewing influences how people in a society perceive groups in both antagonistic and constructive ways (Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt, & Carlson, 2009, p.108). *Social cognitive theory* deals with learning through what you watch on TV (Lee et al., 2009, p. 108). In conclusion, these researchers utilized both cultivation and social cognitive theories, discovering that the co-existence of heavy TV viewing and stereotyping were found to reinforce audience members perceptions. Stereotypes have the potential to be influenced by TV and media, which can cause viewers to form a pre-conceived notion of sorority and fraternity members (Lee et al., 2009).

**BREAKING THROUGH BARRIERS**

Conclusively, researchers have examined how positive and negative stereotypes are easily formed through media portrayal and group identity. In regards to student perceptions, researchers have studied stereotypes associated with Greek and non-Greek students (Wells, 2008; Biernat et al., 1996; McGlone & Aronson, 2007). These scholars discuss the advantageous and detrimental stereotypes associated with social organizations. Based on an individual’s
optimistic or destructive stereotypes of a Greek organization, wearing Greek affiliated clothing can cause stereotyping of sorority/fraternity members. Warber et al (2011) researched the impact of group-identity based on individual interactions. These scholars found that students can stereotype an entire Greek organization in a destructive way because of interactions with a single member of that group. An individual wearing Greek affiliated clothing is representative of their group identity (Warber et al, 2011). Scholars have also studied the impact of media on public insight and group membership (Anastasio et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2009). These researchers conclude that media has the potential to form and support audience members perceptions. How the media perceives a sorority/fraternity can cause stereotyping of individuals wearing Greek affiliated clothing (Warber et al, 2011).

This research will expand on previous studies conducted by Wells (2008); Biernat et al. (1996); Anastasio et al. (2005); Warber et al. (2011); Lee et al (2009); McGlone & Aronson (2007) by surveying student perceptions of stereotypes surrounding Greek affiliated clothing. I will build upon the previous research done by examining how media has influenced student’s perceptions of sorority and fraternity members.

I will examine the perceptions surrounding student stereotyping of Greek affiliated clothing. It has been congruent through the literature review that Greek and non-Greek students have different perspectives of social organizations. Stereotyping causes students to have pre-conceived notions of a certain group which can cause students to feel judged or prone to stereotype threat (McGlone & Aronson, 2007). One way we form negative stereotypes of sororities and fraternities is how media portrays these organizations. I will be exploring stereotypes and attitudes associated with sororities and fraternities depending on the Greek affiliated clothing they wear.
METHODOLOGY

For my study I will use a quantitative method. I will explore if there are stereotypes surrounding Greek affiliated clothing, and discover how these perceptions were formed. By performing a quantitative survey I will reach a larger audience, and as a result will have a less bias result (N. Johnson, personal communication, November 21, 2013). This method will have a more representative end result because participants will be completing this survey on their own without being influenced by their friends or other in-group members.

HYPOTHESES

I have developed two hypotheses for my study, regarding student perceptions of Greek affiliated clothing and group identity.

H1: Students are placed into a stereotypical group identity based on the Greek affiliated clothing they wear.

I chose H1 to decipher if respondents believe there is a stereotype surrounding Greek affiliated clothing. This hypothesis will clarify whether students believe these stereotypes to be advantageous or detrimental.

H2: Greek students are assessed more for their individual identity or group identity based on the stereotypes associated with their in-group Greek affiliated clothing.

I decided to test H2 because this hypothesis will help me explore stereotyping in terms of group and individual identity. As a result, this will give insight into why students feel stereotyped when wearing Greek affiliated clothing and how these perceptions are formed.

PARTICIPANTS

I will be studying all college-aged, (18-23 years old) undergraduate students. It is vital to survey both Greek and non-Greek students so I will have an accurate final result. I will be
analyzing the stereotypical Greek attire in *The House Bunny* (2008) and the TV show *Greek* (2007). Within these texts I will analyze the stereotypes surrounding Greek students in association with clothing and group identity. It is essential to have a large audience so I will have the most accurate account of student perceptions regarding Greek affiliated clothing.

**PROCEDURE**

A survey is a system of collecting data, it allows the researcher to analyze, describe, compare, or explain differing attitudes, experiences, or perceptions (Keyton, 2011, p. 161). I will be conducting a survey to collect my data on student stereotyping of Greek affiliated clothing. I plan to perform an online survey and distribute it to as many students as possible. Having a large response group will allow me to have a less biased result (N. Johnson, personal communication, November 21, 2013). According to Keyton (2011), surveys are used to find correlations between several people so that an accurate generalization can be created from the sample (p.161).

I will be using the ANOVA statistical test to measure student perceptions of Greek affiliated clothing compared to “dressing up” in stereotypical sorority/fraternity attire. For my survey I will take a neck down picture of a woman and a man wearing stereotypical sorority and fraternity attire (sweaters, khakis, pearls, dresses, button ups, etc) and will then compare that image to the same individuals wearing Greek affiliated clothing.

My survey questions will focus on student stereotypes surrounding Greek affiliated clothing (raised Greek letters, screen-print or embroidered shirts, sweatshirts, pins, bags, and sorority jumpers) versus “dressing up” in stereotypical sorority/fraternity attire (sweaters, khakis, pearls, dresses, button ups, etc).

The IV I have chosen is attire. For the purpose of my study I will operationalize Greek affiliated clothing and “dressing up” in stereotypical sorority/fraternity attire. Greek affiliated
clothing can be defined as; raised Greek letters, screen-print, embroidered shirts, sweatshirts, pins, bags, and sorority jumpers. “Dressing up” in Stereotypical sorority and fraternity attire can be illustrated through wearing; sweaters, khakis, pearls, dresses, button up shirts, etc.

The DV I have selected is negative or positive perspectives of student stereotyping regarding Greek affiliated clothing and group identity. I will implement survey questions (see Appendix A) that will help distinguish if stereotypes are prevalent and if students feel they are stereotyped individually or as a group member. The variables I would consider are the negative and positive stereotypes associated with different Greek organizations. I will also consider whether students feel stereotyped in general, as an individual, or as a group member. I believe this procedure is appropriate for my H1 because I am looking for a correlation between student perception of Greek clothing and stereotypical group identity.

CONCLUSION

It has been congruent through the literature review that Greek and non-Greek students have conflicting views of social organizations. This communication phenomenon I am researching is imperative because stereotyping can cause students to have pre-conceived notions about a certain group which can cause individuals to feel prone to stereotype threat. This study will benefit students who feel stereotyped by the Greek affiliated clothing they wear or their group identity. Conducting this research will highlight the perceptions surrounding Greek life and will benefit Greek students who feel they have been stereotyped. This study will help to exemplify the stereotypes surrounding Greek life and has the possibility to change student perspectives.
REFERENCES


groups as a result of heavy television consumption? *Howard Journal Of Communications*, 20(1), 95-110. doi:10.1080/10646170802665281


APPENDIX A

POSSIBLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Stereotyping of Greek students is an issue at this university?
   Strongly disagree   Generally disagree   Unsure   Generally agree   Strongly Agree   Not applicable
   1                  2                    3                    4                    5

   This question will help me discover if students believe there is an issue of stereotyping prevalent among students. This will also help me decipher between student perceptions of positive and negative stereotyping regarding Greek organizations.

2. Greek Life is a prominent aspect of this university?
   Strongly disagree   Generally disagree   Unsure   Generally agree   Strongly Agree   Not applicable
   1                  2                    3                    4                    5

   This question will give me better insight on student perception of Greek life in general. It will also show how involved the participant believes the student body is within social Greek life.