Sorority Life and Its Impacts on Young Women

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Most people are somewhat familiar as to what a sorority is. It’s an organization that is within Greek life at colleges and universities that is only available to women. It is thought to be where you meet your “sisters” and friends you will have forever. Also, sororities seem to place value on their organization as a whole rather than the individuals who make it up. With that being said, how does being a part of a sorority effect a woman individually? This is the question being answered through social categorization and physical appearance.

The process of joining a sorority has been relatively the same for many years. Typically, a woman must go through rush week. This week is filled of various events that the inductees are expected to attend, they also visit different sororities and try to figure out which one they would like to join. Throughout the course of the week, the potential members pick their top 3 choices and are basically either accepted or denied membership. Then once the week is over, they “run home” to their chosen sorority and become a member.

To begin analyzing women in sororities, I thought it was fitting to discuss social categorization. Social categorization is how people view themselves and others and place them (and themselves) into certain social groups (N. Johnson, personal communication, March 22, 2019) . Before a college aged woman is even picked to become a member of a sorority, she first categorizes herself. In a way, this a good thing to do because all sororities are different with their philanthropies and the types of women who are in them. However, this processing of putting yourself in a certain category limits the woman in what she thinks she can be a part of. Some sororities are said to be harder to get into than others and a woman might feel as though she isn’t cool or popular enough to be accepted.

Social categorization is not only used for the potential members but for the current sisters of sororities as well. In order for them to choose who to induct into their organization, they must categorize the potential members. This categorization process mostly takes place when the potential members meet the current members. Throughout the short conversations they have, current members are paying attention to the potential members body language, their diction when speaking, and even what they look like. Those are just a few examples of how current members place potential members into categories, seeing if they would “fit in” into their organization or not. As one can see, social categorization is practically the basis of rush week for potential sorority members as well as current ones.

When discussing sorority life, physical appearance is also something to consider. Physical appearance is practically every viewable aspect of an individual (Beauchamp & Baran, 2017). This could be a person’s skin type, race, clothing, and so on. Going back to when potential members are conversing with current members, the current members are not only paying attention to what they say but also what they look like. In part of being granted membership in a sorority, a member has to look the part. By analyzing the physical appearance of various sororities, one can note that many of the members have similar appearances. Some dress a certain style, the majority have the same hair color or style of hair and so on. It is evident that during the process of induction (rush week) physical appearance is a key factor. Potential members often even dress up during this week to show the “best” versions of themselves. Physical appearance is such an important aspect of sorority life, its importance is noticed before even becoming a member.

In a study by Reno and McNamee in 2015, they surveyed how sorority members influence their members thoughts on their body image through memorable messages. Memorable messages are defined as “…significant messages that people remember for a long time and have a considerable impact on our lives” (Reno & McNamee, 2015, p. 388). According to the results of the study, the majority of memorable messages amongst this group of women were focused on physical appearance, particularly to one’s weight. While the majority of these messages were taken positively by the sorority members, their meaning was only focused on weight and appearance, not well-being. These seemingly encouraging messages of weight loss and maintaining one’s appearance, could motivate sorority members to form unhealthy eating and weight loss habits. Also, these messages focused on appearance, were mostly said by older sorority members. This gives these messages more meaning for new members because they want to be like the current members as much as possible. This study sheds a light on how the group like thinking of sorority life can persuade new members negatively. Also, the results of this study prove that these memorable messages can have negative impacts on the potential sorority members during rush week.

As one can see, sorority life isn’t quite what it’s cracked up to be. After analyzing it on the context of social categorization and physical appearance, it is evident that becoming a member of a sorority is a fairly superficial process. There is a lot of value placed on potential members physical appearance instead of their thoughts and viewpoints. Therefore, the study proves that this way of thinking can have negative effects on their members health. In conclusion, sororities place way too much value into categorizing people and physical appearance that it can impact their members negatively.

Bibliography

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