

Hazing in the college setting is a problem that seems to go unnoticed and unreported for the most part, thus, allowing it to be regarded as “normal” and even acceptable behavior. Most predominantly, this hazing occurs within the Greek system on many campuses and involves, but is not limited to, physical, mental and sexual abuse, all of which can potentially lead to acts of violence outside of the Greek system such as gang rape. And while fraternity hazing rituals seem to appear in the news more often than sorority hazing events, of which only ten or so are reported each year, sorority sisters are just as guilty of such acts as their fellow brothers (Carlton). As the dean of students at Depauw University, a college well-known for Greek scandals, thinks that women are just as creative as men when it comes to hazing (Nuwer 158). In some ways sorority rituals do not just mimic those of fraternities but actually encourage them. Physically and mentally abusive sorority pledging rituals as well as required pledging events that encourage open sexual behavior and drug use not only harm the bodies and minds of those involved but also influence their ethical and moral values. Furthermore, when sororities condone and encourage behavior such as abuse, “hooking-up” and binge drinking, men, especially those in the fraternities located nearest sorority houses, come to believe it is okay to treat women in the same way their pledge masters treat them and male dominance is established. In the words of the President of Auburn University, “the greatest impact on the behavior of young [fraternity] men on the campus could be had by the young [sorority] women...by continuing to participate fully...they are enablers” (Nuwer 155).

Freshman year of college is no doubt a memorable experience for most students, but for sorority pledges, especially, it is year they will never forget. College takes on an entirely different meaning for recruits once “rush” begins introducing them to a whole new and socially different world. In the beginning of pledging a sense of belonging is instilled within the minds of

the participants but attitudes soon change once the initiation process begins. This process is usually carried out through a series of rituals that are often physically and mentally detrimental to the participants and sometimes require those involved to consume unhealthy amounts of alcohol. There are also many practices that encourage sexual behavior that would otherwise be considered inappropriate. All of these rituals are performed in hopes of being accepted by a group of girls later to be called “sisters”.

The most widely reported hazing rituals are those that cause physical harm to the pledges. Some such rituals involve doing strenuous work such as cleaning, running, crawling and doing pushups. At Colorado State University, for example, the pledge masters forced their newest members to “horizontally support themselves with only one arm and their toes until they counted to 1920, the year of the national sorority’s founding” (McSwane). In more extreme situations, such as an incident that took place at DePauw University in which pledges were burned with cigarettes, such harm has even been inflicted on the pledges by their sisters (Nuwer xvi). Just this year a victim in Delta Sigma Theta at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga reported being punched, kicked, paddled and having ice cold water dumped on her head, vinegar squirted into her eyes and eggs broken in her hair all as a part of her pledging process (Student Arrested). Furthermore, pledges are often deprived of food or forced to consume inedible substances. In the book *Fraternity Gang Rape* a former sorority sister describes a ritual that she had to perform in which “plastic buckets full of a horrid-smelling substance” were passed around “from girl to girl, until [they were] completely empty.” After completing this task, she says, many girls vomited and a few even fainted (Sanday 207).

Stories such as this make it evident that pledges’ physical well being is at risk. The pledging process is one that takes up a sufficient amount of time and effort and often involves

physical abuse, all of which leave the victims fatigued, hungry, stressed, dehydrated, dizzy and sometimes even suffering from high blood pressure (McSwane). Death has also been a result in rare cases adding to the statistic that since 1970 as least one person a year has died due to college campus hazing events (Anti Hazing). Their mental well being is also in danger for these acts encourage violence and mistreatment not only of themselves but also of other people. Pledging is a cycle in which everyone starts out at the bottom as a participant but eventually becomes a leader. So in a sense these rituals allow the females involved to believe that such act are normal and, thus, it is ok for them to suffer such abuse just as it is ok for them to later inflict this same pain on future pledges.

While mentally abusive rituals are seen less in the news they are probably the most rumored of all types of rituals. After finishing buckets of mysterious substances, the girls mentioned in *Fraternity Gang Rape* were made to stand still while older sisters wrote “everything they didn’t like about [them] or what [they] needed to change” on the white t-shirts they were wearing at the time (Sanday 207). Being reprimanded for flaws is not uncommon in the pledging process and often goes a step further when pledges are unjustly ridiculed. They are told that they are embarrassing, disgusting, ugly and whores, all of which are usually not true but said to make the pledges feel insecure (Wagner). Body imperfections are also targeted during such rituals. At the University of Southern California and other colleges, for example, freshman girls are required to stand in an area, such as the front lawn of their house, in only a bra and underwear while various people circle the imperfect areas of their bodies.

At first, all of these practices leave the girls feeling inadequate and self-conscious but, through a process of conformity, they eventually lead to a false sense of privilege and a judgmental mentality. After their self-esteem is sufficiently lowered through such acts the

pledges feel compelled to continue participating in the rituals in hopes of fitting in and becoming more like their fellow sisters. They realize the powers that their masters hold over them and aspire to gain the same authority, achieving it by partaking in humiliating and demeaning customs and eventually conforming to the ways of the sorority. Through this process the participants become more critical of themselves and of others believing that it is fair to judge others. Moreover, a cycle is created in which recruits feel that it is acceptable for others to control their actions and that one day it will be acceptable for them to control future recruit's actions.

Another aspect of pledging includes outlandish requirements that often encourage drinking and "hooking up." Most sororities do not have their own parties but usually co-sponsor or at least support those held in fraternity houses. In many cases these daily parties, or mixers, are considered mandatory for recruits "as part of [their] pledge obligations" (Sanday 120) and "usually consist of drinking (top shelf liquors), smoking pot, and using a variety of other on-demand drugs in the upstairs rooms," as one female student from The University of Pennsylvania can attest to (Sanday 205). There have also been cases in which girls have had bottles of alcohol strapped to their arms and have been forced to drink all of the liquid in order to have the bottles removed (Newur 158). Katey, a Lehigh student who graduated in 2008, describes the night she received her bid explaining, "we had to drink our own bottle of champagne in ten minutes" (Wagman). Alcohol also plays a part in the ritual process outside of the party scene such as when pledges are punished for incorrectly answering trivia questions by having to take shots of alcohol (Newur 158). Again, such acts are physically dangerous to participants and can lead to alcohol addiction, alcohol poisoning and, potentially, death. In fact, "eighty-two percent of deaths from hazing involve alcohol" (Anti Hazing). They also affect the mind set of those involved

permitting such individuals to view drug consumption as acceptable behavior even though it is illegal and dangerous.

In conjunction with alcohol and partying often comes sex. In college it seems as though “hooking up has replaced dating” and so it is no surprise that the majority of fraternities and sororities have been known to encourage “hook-ups,” or sexual acts with no strings attached, and frown upon relationships (Boswell and Spade 106). About her experiences with the sororities at Penn, Natasha says that “hooking-up was always encouraged and talked about—the best (usually, the most public) stories were shared during weekly meetings” (Sanday 205). As part of her initiation process Natasha attended a fraternity mixer called “Anything for \$1” in which she was made to wear lingerie and take shots of alcohol given to her by fraternity brothers. By the end of this event her pledge sisters were giving lap dances to the guys while licking whip cream off of their bodies (Sanday 206). In other stories pledges were required to attend similar mixers with male-dominant themes such as “bros and hoes” or “CEOs and secretaries” in which they had to wear demeaning or humiliating clothing. Researchers have also found cases about pledges who had to disclose their sexual histories in front of their entire house (Nuwer 158) and watch porn (Hyman). Such incidents involving “sexual intimidation, nudity or stimulation” have seen an increase in frequency since 1995 (Anti hazing).

In general, these requirements promote distasteful behavior such as wearing revealing clothing and having frequent meaningless sex. They give those involved a reason to believe that their bodies are not sacred but are meant to be shared with anyone who is interested in using or abusing them. By creating a “hook-up” culture, sororities allow relationships between the men and women to be solely based on sex, resulting in the belief that the only relationships that pledges can have with men are sexual relationships. Thus, these women allow themselves to

become the “faceless” victim, a woman whom male partners have no further obligations to. As with all of the types of rituals, the morals and principles pledges once lived their lives by start to fade and the detrimental principles of the sorority take their place.

Fraternity rituals are very similar to those mentioned throughout this paper but differ in the fact that they also target many Greek and non-Greek females on campus. Just as sorority pledges are expected to share their sexual stories with their pledge class, fraternity pledges are required to do the same and sometimes even make their one-night stands apart of the weekly minutes. During such discussions women are often referred to by derogatory terms such as “wench” and “bimbo,” words comparable to those used by pledge masters to describe the same women such as “whore” (Sanday 69). At parties fraternity brothers also have a system of rating the appearance and willingness of the women who walk through their doors, sometimes by giving them a thumbs up or thumbs down (Boswell and Spade 105) or by sticking colored dots on their backs that each stand for how “easy” a girl is (Sanday 111). Again, this system intended to point out the females’ flaws is a mechanism that is used during sorority initiation, as well. All of these acts subject the men involved to an unhealthy way of thinking that they are superior to women and are, therefore, allowed to control or mistreat them, a way of thinking that often leads to acts of physical, mental and sexual violence.

Jannet, an alumni of Lehigh University who desisterized from a sorority her sophomore year, makes a good point with the statement, “girls, you’d think, would be less aggressive, but if anything, they’re the ones that proliferate the kind of thinking fraternities possess” (Hess). Physically abusive rituals give guys the impression that they have the “right” to physically harm sorority girls because their pledge masters do so to them. Similarly, mentally abusive rituals give men a reason to unfairly judge women. Furthermore, by throwing sex and alcohol in to the mix

women allow themselves to be viewed as a “sexual outlet” and nothing more (Boswell and Spade 107). The pledging process not only affects the physical and mental health of those involved on a personal level but also on a public level because it leads to a male-dominant mindset and, thus, a belief the men with this mindset hold that they can inflict this same abuse upon women. Overall, “the whole pledging process is so degrading, that pledges are definitely more vulnerable to be taken advantage of by a male in a fraternity setting,” acclaims Katey (Wagman). The first step to stopping this violence, then, is to take a stand against the ideals that sororities and, by association, pledges hold to a high esteem. Muse suggests that, “if they would simply say that these are standards of behavior we will not condone and that we will not have anything to do with fraternities that abuse alcohol and engage in (bad) behavior it would be the most significant thing anybody can do on campus” (Nuwer 155).

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