

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY OF SORORITY WOMEN: THE INTERPLAY OF
BELONGING, APPEARANCE, REPRESENTATION AND INSTITUTIONAL
MEANING

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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MAY 2013

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the Dissertation entitled

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY OF SORORITY WOMEN: THE INTERPLAY OF BELONGING, APPEARANCE, REPRESENTATION AND INSTITUTIONAL MEANING

presented by Kathleen Krueger

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my best friend, Diana Howell Gast. For the past twelve years, your friendship has made a world of difference in my life. Your intelligence, spontaneity, kindness, and loyalty make you the best friend, and the best person, that I have ever known. You helped me become the person that I always wanted to be. Though we are technically adults, with jobs, degrees, and families, we will always have the spirit and the attitudes of toga partying nineteen year olds, devoted to learning, travel, and eccentricity.

Throughout twelve years, dozens of cities, and several countries, our adventures and shenanigans have given me incredible joy, and wonderful memories. Beyond the excitement and adventure, I know that we will always be there for each other, no matter what life throws our way. I could not have finished grad school or this dissertation without you and your support. We said we would get our PhD, and now we have! I love you always.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I must thank the sorority women of the University of Missouri, for sharing their experiences, thoughts, and lives with me. I could not have completed this project without their willingness and openness to discuss their community with me. To the twenty women from the ten sororities involved: thank you so much!

My advisor, Dr. Wayne Brekhus, has been the most supportive, helpful, and wonderful advisor and friend that I could possibly imagine. From my first semester, when he told me that he couldn't imagine not working with me, to this very moment of planning for eventual article publication, Wayne has provided constant support and inspiration. Sociologically, his commitment to grounded theory, thick description, and study of identity performed in every detail of life, has formed me as an academic. His passion for teaching, filled with excitement and eccentricity, has provided me with the foundation for the teaching career that I am about to pursue. Most importantly, Wayne and his wife Rachel have been wonderful, understanding, and giving friends for the past six years. Through dinners, game nights, parties, and softball, we have shared so much joy, which I know will continue as I head to Maryland. I have the best advisor in the world, and I am ever grateful for all of his support and friendship.

Dr. Joan Hermsen has been a constant inspiration to me throughout our years of work together. Her dedication and commitment to her work has helped me become the sociologist I am today. By constantly pushing me to read more, think more, and do more, she has contributed more to my knowledge of the social world than anyone. Through

asking me the hardest questions, she has given me the ability to provide the best answers. Because of her help and inspiration, I am confident that I will start my career as the best professor that I can be.

Dr. Jay Gubrium has provided me with years of support and academic inspiration. Through his courses in qualitative methodology, he has helped me hone the research abilities that made this dissertation possible. His commitment to sociology and his incredible confidence have provided me with the inspiration necessary for me to confidently move forward as a sociologist and as a researcher.

Finally, Dr. Mary Grigsby's encouragement and support has provided me with so much wonderful knowledge and the ability and confidence to pursue my goals. By directing me to research and ideas on the relationship between consumer culture, class, and college social culture, she has provided me with a wonderful foundation for taking my research to the next level. I appreciate her willingness to join my committee and her dedication to my project more than I can say.

I could not have completed my schooling, my dissertation, and the past thirty one years without the constant love and support of my family, especially my parents, James and Mary Lou Krueger. Their unwavering commitment to me and my wonderful sister Maureen has made me sure that I have the best parents in the world. Mom and Dad, without you, this dissertation and degree wouldn't exist. Thank you so much.

I am truly fortunate to have the most wonderful friends in world. I never would have dreamed that I would have so many caring, supportive, and fun people in my life.

My Mizzou crew has made these the best years ever. Thank you to Lindy Hern, Matt Humphrey, Veronica Medina, Dan Cailler, Mike Sickels, Derek Evans, Jenn Stafford (and Jade!) and Colin Suchland for all of the great times! Finally, thank you to my Icelandic family! Habby, Gummi, Jakob, Oddur, and Arni- I love you more than anything.

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Kathleen Ellen Krueger

Dr. Wayne Brekhus, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

In this project, I explore the connections sorority women on a large college campus create between their appearance, sorority membership, sense of belonging, and identity. By interviewing twenty members of ten of the University of Missouri's fourteen sororities, a fuller picture of the interplay between appearance and sorority identity emerged.

While sorority women are often stereotyped as shallow and conformist, based largely on the perceived focus on consumption and appearance, as discussed by Robbins (2005), my research reevaluates the utility and motivation behind sorority women's use of clothing, styles, and consumption. Rather than being illustrations of groupthink or conformity, sorority women's use of symbols, brands, styles, and language serves to construct a complex set of rules designed to facilitate belonging, both within the sorority system and on campus as a whole.

Through the use of certain modes of appearance, consumption patterns, and prescribed actions, sorority women indicate their willingness to adhere to their organizations' stated and unstated values systems. The interplay between appearance, consumption, organizational identity, and belonging shapes the sorority experience along multiple dimensions.

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY

Introduction

This study looks at how sorority membership affects and influences how women present themselves physically and relate to contemporary standards of attractiveness. By focusing on women's experiences of belonging in a sorority, this work establishes a connection between sorority membership, appearance, belonging, and material consumption.

Through an analysis of how membership in a sorority both in general and as a member of a particular sorority chapter impacts and shapes appearance practices, I evaluate the connection between appearance and organizational identity. The performance of appearance and identity in sorority members is linked, and this study analyzes the intricacies of that link with a ground level focus that incorporates appearance, organizational identity and performance. The study examines how chosen appearance and self-presentation result from participation in a certain organization, in this case, Panhellenic sororities, and how appearance standards are used to demonstrate belonging in the organization. For sorority women, the interplay between belonging and appearance exists along several dimensions. Crucial among those are self-presentation as a potential member of a sorority and also as a full member of a chapter. The interplay between, appearance and consumption ability is also a central determinant of belonging for sorority women.

The goal of this project is to examine how sorority women enact and perform standards of appearance as part of their identity as sorority members. This research

answers questions about the degree to which sorority women perform and connect physical appearance to their identities. This study also examines how sorority members incorporate appearance standards held by the larger culture, the collegiate Greek system, and/or their individual sorority in shaping their appearance, presentation, and representation of their chapter. The use of appearance as a method of demonstrating organizational membership and constructing group belonging are focal points of this research. Another goal of the project is to examine the extent to which sorority members relate to beauty ideals and recognize their relationship with beauty ideals and their performance thereof, both individually and comparatively (to other women both within and outside of their sorority). Finally, this project examines how appearance standards connect with privileging aspects of identity such as class and gender. Sorority women forge a sense of belonging as members of their organizations along several distinct fronts. This construction of an identity as a sorority member occurs through careful management of clothing, makeup, and body maintenance, as well as through actions during sorority recruitment and beyond. While sorority women use several interrelated strategies, no strategy dominates. Rather, all interconnections between appearance, actions, and identity are used equally to shape a woman's sense of belonging in her sorority and the Greek community as a whole.

In looking at how sorority women negotiate appearance standards, several responses or strategies emerge. Sorority members either deny or acknowledge the importance of beauty standards while simultaneously challenging or adhering to said

standards, all within the framework of sorority identity. Some women did agree that appearance standards are important for membership and follow these standards or reject them by choosing to present themselves differently than sorority mandates would require. Alternatively, some women claimed that appearance is not an important characteristic for their sorority, and their actions either supported this assertion or belied it via discussion of specific practices. For sorority members, previous research suggests that meeting certain standards of appearance may be essential not only for entrance in to the organization, but also for maintenance once entry has been granted (Basow et al 2007, Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009). Non-academic accounts of sorority life in popular culture confirm this as well (Robbins, 2005). Thus, the sorority community was an excellent site to study the connections between appearance, organizational identity, and the success or failure thereof. My study of sororities provided an opportunity to analyze the connections between consuming and class, consumption and appearance, and gendered standards and organizational identity performance.

Appearance standards are also an important locus in which not only gender presentation, but also class presentation is enacted. For women in particular, the body becomes a site of identity work and display (Arthur 1999, Bettie 2002, Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006). For college students, appearance and class presentation are important parts of the experience of identity construction, as both appearance and class are key determinants of the college experience. Sorority women also serve as a representation of

a large portion of the college demographic, as well as a group that is often associated with ideals of female appearance and social class. Thus, these women are an important group to study in examining how these ideas shape identity. In looking at sorority women, this study can also make a general contribution to studies of beauty and identity among young middle class women. Because the body and appearance are used to determine the social position, organizational identity and acceptability of individuals in many cases in an appearance driven society, studying this widespread phenomenon in a smaller population serves to explain the connection between organizational identity and appearance.

Using in-depth interviews focusing on appearance standards, definition of sorority membership and value and the import of appearance on sorority membership, this research explores how college sorority women enact and display standards of appearance as part of their organizational identity as members of individual Greek letter organizations. These qualitative methods provide detailed information about the stated motivations sorority women have in negotiating the identity space created in the interactions of appearance and sorority membership, including the salience of material goods for determining belonging.

Limitations of Focus in Prior Research on Sorority Women

The experiences of sorority women exist at an intersection of self, where organizational identity is closely linked to appearance, gender presentation, and beauty

work. In order to become and remain a successful member of a sorority, women must perform gender and enact class and appearance in a manner that adheres to the organization's standards. As such, it is necessary to study the interactions of these factors in exploring the lives of college sorority members.

However, most of the existing research into sorority culture focuses on the social problems of alcohol use and sexual violence. While these two elements are important issues in collegiate Greek life, focusing on solely on social problems ignores the more everyday issues of gender and identity that are constructed through beauty work and gender presentation. To get a sense of sorority life and everyday practice, it becomes necessary to focus on more unmarked aspects of the sorority experience, such as everyday construction of sorority identity via appearance. While several studies have addressed sorority women, gender, and appearance, these few studies are largely out of date and may not reflect the current status of the field.

Recent and past research into the lives of sorority women has tended to focus on two topics: sorority members and alcohol usage (Bernstein et al 2007, Capone et al 2007, Hutching, Lac, & LaBrie 2008, Fairlie et al 2010, Larimer et al 2004, McCabe et al 2005, Park et al 2008), or dating violence and date rape (Anderson & Danis 2007, Danis & Anderson 2008, Minow & Einolf 2009) for example. While these are two salient components of the sorority experience, and legitimate social problems experienced by sorority women, ignoring unmarked issues of organizational identity and gendered experiences of appearance limits the scope of analysis of this population, as well as

limiting the degree to which conclusions reached in studying sorority women can be applied to similar populations. These social problems point to problems of gender through the interactions of sorority members with men and expectations of feminine social and sexual behavior, yet more mundane problems of gender exist in the lives of sorority members as well. Other studies that do address sorority identity issues focus on concerns regarding class or concerns body image, and while these studies do shed light on problems in the world of sorority members, they do not fully integrate and juxtapose how issues of class, beauty and identity work together to inform the sorority experience (Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009). Focusing entirely on the social problems experienced by female members of the Greek community at American universities neglects crucial issues of identity and beauty, both of which are present in the mundane, everyday life and Greek experience of sorority members, which may influence and contribute to these social problems. By studying how appearance and organizational identity interact in the daily life of sorority women, I will provide a foundation for further and more thorough research into the sorority experience.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Appearance and Organizational Identity

In creating organizational identities, individuals are not merely recipients of the identities deemed appropriate for them by the organization, but rather are active participants in shaping and choosing which aspects of identity to display in which contexts (Ashforth and Johnson 2001, Kreiner et al 2006, Markus & Kunda 1986, Mead 1934, Wilkins 2008). Because organizational identity is fluid, and relies on those who make up the organization, interactions with both insiders and outsiders work to shape an organizational identity for members (Brown et al 2006, Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail 1994, Wilkins 2008). Members of an organization draw on both their perceptions of their organization and their assessment of others' perceptions of their organization in shaping a concept of organizational identity (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail 1994, Lievens et al, 2007).

Within organizations, shared habits, practices and ideals mark membership and foster cohesion among members. One manner in which cohesion is developed and displayed by members of an organization is through clothing and appearance (Corley, et al 2006, Kaiser 1990, Martin 2002, Pratt & Rafaeli 1997, Swain 2002). By sharing a similar style of clothing or other appearance markers, a sense of connectedness and unity is developed among members of an organization (Freitas et al, 1997, Kaiser 1993, Pratt & Rafaeli 1997, Swain 2002). Dress and other appearance characteristics serve as symbols

that convey what the organization believes, practices, and values, and by association, the beliefs, practices and values of the individual member (Pratt & Rafaeli 1997). An individual's participation (or desire to participate) in a certain group, organization, or subculture is often expressed and represented via dress and appearance, and a group culture itself frequently grows out of shared appearance choices and characteristics (Brewis et al 1997, Kendall 2002, Lurie 1992, Swain 2002, Wilkins 2008). Martin (2002) argues that organizations and their rules and ideals can override frames created for the societal meaning of the body, giving appearance an organizational meaning that is strategic as well as personal. An additional use of dress in an organization is to create a hierarchical structure both for insiders and outsiders (Joseph 1986, Lurie 1981, Pratt & Rafaeli 1997, Swain 2002). Formal and informal mandates or strictures for dress and appearance function as control over individual members, and a subsumption of individual identity to the identity of the group (Joseph 1986, Lurie 1981, Pratt & Rafaeli 1997). Additionally, for women, dress and appearance mandates, both formal and informal serve to display a potential member's willingness to comply, and this, willingness to be a part of the organization (Kendall 2002).

Not only does clothing serve as a way to mark membership or inclusion in a desired group, it also serves to draw boundaries between the individual and groups that they choose not to associate with (Freitas et al 1997, Wilkins 2008). By choosing to adhere to a group's chosen style of appearance, an individual illustrates their commitment to being a part of the organization. Scholarly research suggests that organizations

frequently bracket themselves and the identities of their members in a binary, exclusionary form- “we are this, because we are not that” (Corley et al 2006, Loseke 2007, Pratt & Rafaeli 1997). By framing an organization’s membership in terms of contrast to outsiders, the stage is set for the use of appearance and dress to serve as signals that as a member of a particular organization, and individual is ‘set apart’ from others (Corley et al 2006, Freitas et al 1997, Loseke 2007, Wilkins 2008).

Organizational uses of appearance also function as an indicator of social location. Clothes, dress, and appearance serve to illustrate one’s membership in or rejection of social class (Bettie 2002, Crane & Bovone 2006, Freitas, et al 1997). Gender is also communicated through clothing and appearance, which is particularly important for organizations that hold gender display as a crucial component (Finkelstein 1996, Goffman 1979, Swain 2002). By constructing gender through appearance, group identity work serves to create codes and symbols for both organizations and individuals (Martin 2002, Schwalbe & Mason Shrock 1996). Fashion can serve as a symbol of collective identity by separating individuals from members of other groups (Kaiser 1993). As such, individual choices about what to wear and how to present one’s self are inextricably linked to the organizational or group identity that one espouses.

Organizational Identity and Sorority Women

Organizations and organizational hierarchies are innately gendered as masculine, and as such, gender cannot be separated from organizations and organizational processes

(Acker 1990). One important function of organizations is to serve as a location for gender to be invented and reproduced, which is seen quite clearly in sorority women, who adhere to hegemonic standards of femininity that are consistently upheld and reproduced (Arthur 1997, Arthur 1999, Basow et al 2007, Hunt & Miller 1997, Hamilton 2007, Handler 1995, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009). Far from being merely social organizations, the values held and displayed by social groups serve as crucial tools in constructing and defining identity (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). For collegiate women, sorority life provides women with the opportunities to construct an identity that makes use of organizational identity.

One way in which gendered differences in organizational identity manifest themselves is in different modes of attachment to groups (Seeley, et al 2003). Following Prentice's ideas of common bond as "attachment to a group derived directly from attachment to the individual members of the group" versus common identity as "direct attachment to the group itself", women and men find value and attach salience to group identity differently (Prentice et al, 1994). Women find group membership far more important and salient if they have relational attachments to individual members of their group, as women tend to value relational bonds as opposed to the collective bonds valued by men (Gabriel and Gardner 1999, Seeley et al, 2003). As members of organizations, women focus on the individual relational bonds the organization allows them to form, and often join organizations specifically to facilitate these bonds (Seeley et al, 2003). Individuals forge their identities and senses of self via "ongoing patterns of action and

interactions” (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). As social institutions that provide women with a continual location for this shaping of identity, sororities can be seen as an ideal site to explore the patterns and interactions through identities are created. Sororities provide a clear illustration of the importance of relational bonds in shaping organizational identity, as most sorority women report joining a sorority organization to make friends and create relational bonds, and emphasize the importance of their small in-group of friends once they have joined their sorority (Arthur 1997, Hunt and Miller 1997, Ryan 2009, Seeley et al, 2003).

Time also is a factor in how sorority women construct their identity as members of the sorority organization. For many organizations, collective identity is created by comparing the present self to the collective past (Ybema 2010). For sorority women, connecting with and discussing the history and founding principles of their sororities functions as a way to emphasize and place value on their participation in the organization, even if these principles are irrelevant in the day to day of the current organization (Kendall 2002, Ybema 2010). By linking the present self with a “beautified past or a promising future” of the organization, sorority women use temporality to reinforce their organizational identity and the personal connection they have with their organization (Ybema 2010). Connections to the past also play a large role in sorority identity for women whose mothers or other family members were sorority members (Kendall 2002, Ryan 2009). This added level of connection to the sorority strengthens a member’s identity as part of the sorority organization itself.

Displays of Organizational Identity in Sorority Women

Research has indicated that for sorority-affiliated college students, organizational sorority identity (or Greek involvement in general equals individual identity, or at least students' presentation of such (Ryan 2009, Stuber 2005). For sorority women, as with individuals in general, organizational identity is created largely through interaction, and this interaction usually calls upon acceptable presentation of both a gendered self and a sorority-identified self, both of which are predicated on conforming to feminine strictures of beauty. This presentation relies heavily on gendered characteristics, as sororities value strict versions of feminine self-presentation (Arthur 1997, Arthur 1999, Basow et al 2007, Hunt & Miller 1997, Hamilton 2007, Handler 1995, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009).

Dress is a visible indicator and display of organizational identity and group affiliation. The use of clothing and appearance standards among members of a group serves to cultivate a sense of connection within the group itself, and at the same time informs outsiders of the group's existence and distinction (Arthur 1997, Kaiser 1990). By following a set of appearance guidelines, sorority women show their inclusion in the interactional subculture of their individual sorority, forging a group look that strengthens and reinforces a sense of organizational identity (Hunt and Miller 1997). The choice of clothing, makeup, and other elements of style serves to mark boundaries between organization members and outsiders (Bettie 2003, Kaiser 1990, Wilkins 2008). While the

subcultural look of sorority women is similar to other looks present in the larger cultural scene, it still functions as a distinct marker of group identity.

In addition to adhering to particular standards of appearance, sorority women utilize other tangible illustrations of identity that act in concert with the idealized physical image so valued by sorority members (Arthur 1997, Kendall 2002, Ryan 2009). Signs and symbols of sorority members such as Greek letter necklaces, logo sweatshirts and jackets, sorority event t-shirts, letter key chains, headbands, flip flops, tote bags, and myriad other forms of merchandise all function as visible presentation symbols that underscore a member's organizational identity as a member of the sorority. The use of these items not only shows membership, and values associated with the social identity category of 'sorority' member' but also function as an illustration of conformity to acceptable presentation of self, much in the same way that adhering to beauty standards does (Arthur 1997, Crane and Bovone 2006, Ryan 2009). New members whose identities as part of the organization are not fully formed utilize these physical symbols more than older members who have integrated their sorority identity into their overall concept of self (Arthur 1997). For sorority women, membership carries great weight in shaping personal identity, as sorority identity is highly valued, so is the display of this organizational identity through visible signals of membership (Handler 1995, Stuber 2005). Women in sororities considered more prestigious tend to place more stock in visible symbols of sorority identity and affiliation, suggesting that the salience of sorority identity is not constant through all members (Kendall 2002). The visible self is highly

important for women, based on gendered expectations of presentations of self and body, and extremely important for sorority women, whose identity as sorority women is predicated on conformity to gendered expectations of presentation (Basow et al 2007, Bordo [1993] 2003, Tseelon 1995).

Sorority women enact their organizational identity through a combination of presentation and performance, both of which are highly gendered. Previous research has found that sorority women internalize a thin body ideal more than other women, and experience more intra-sorority pressure to maintain this ideal (Basow et al 2007, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). Even prior to sorority recruitment (rush), women who intended to join a sorority had higher levels of disordered eating and objectified body consciousness than women who did not intend to join houses (Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). During the recruitment process, the focus on bodily appearance and the degree to which a potential member's appearance fits the sorority ideal leads to high levels of bodily objectification, which does not decline once one becomes a member (Basow et al 2007, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009). Once in a sorority, women reported more pressure to adhere to the thin ideal and still higher levels of disordered eating and body objectification (ibid). The longer women lived in a sorority house, higher they scored on these scales. Since organizational identity is stronger in an isolated group, and those women in sororities already reported unhealthy eating patterns and high belief in the thin ideal, as their sorority identity was strengthened through duration and isolation, their performance of this identity through eating and body

presentation strengthened as well (Adler and Adler 1991, Alexander 1996, Basow et al 2007, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010).

Anderson and Atlas and Morier demonstrated that sorority women are rated as more highly attractive than women who reside in dorms or in off campus housing (Anderson 2001, Atlas & Morier 1994). Not only are sorority women considered more physically attractive by other college students, they also value beauty and appearance far more than other college women (Basow et al 2007, Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006, Hamilton 2007, Handler 1995, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). Sorority women uphold beauty ideals within their houses by excluding potential members who do not fit the physical ideal maintained by house members, and also by censuring members who fail to maintain their appearance once they have joined the sorority (Atlas & Morier 1994, Basow et al 2007, Hamilton 2007, Handler 1995, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). According to numerous studies of sorority women, appearance and clothing are crucially important during rush, as they underscore a potential member's commitment and adherence to beauty standards (Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009).

Research has found that while college women as a whole have more issues with disordered eating and body image than any other group, sorority women have the most issues among college women (Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006). In a study examining gender role development and body image in college men and women, Meghan Gillen and Eva Leftkowitz found that individuals who were considered "gender-typed" and who

processed things in terms of cultural gender values were more likely to have body image issues (2006). Sorority women were typed as very feminine, very likely to believe that women are supposed to be thin and beautiful in order to be suitably feminine, and thus were very likely to report poor body image (ibid). For sorority women, femininity is strongly linked to contemporary beauty ideals (Arthur 1997, Arthur 1999, Basow et al 2007, Hunt & Miller 1997).

Several studies have found that for sorority women, adhering to a strict interpretation of femininity is paramount for maintaining an acceptable sorority identity (Arthur 1997, Arthur 1999, Basow et al 2007, Hunt & Miller 1997, Kendall 2002, Ryan 2009). Women who fail to present as appropriately feminine, lacking signals of beauty such as long hair, slim figures, and stylish clothes and contemporary makeup rarely make it past the rush stage to join a sorority (Arthur 1999, Rolnik, Engeln Maddox, and Miller 2010). However, for those women already in the sorority, deviant appearance (lack of makeup, scruffy clothes, etc.) is managed by not wearing sorority letters, t-shirts or jewelry when so dressed, in order to avoid harming the image of the sorority as a collective (Arthur 1999, Hunter & Miller 1997). According to sorority members, letters can't and shouldn't be worn unless their appearance meets standards. Sorority identity is also regulated through formal or informal rankings of chapters, and these reputations are frequently based on members' appearances and financial statuses (Kendall 2002, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox, and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009). These rankings bolster the idea of

sorority identity as a non-uniform status category- an individual's sorority identity varies significantly based on the chapter of which she is a member (Arthur 1999).

Sorority Women, Consumption, and Class

Consumption and class are also key components in sorority membership. The higher the family income of members, the higher the overall rank of the house, compared to others on campus (Arthur 1999 Atlas & Morier 1994, Kendall 2002). Sorority membership is used to reinforce and reproduce high social status, as mothers and other family members work hard to ensure that their daughters are accepted into elite houses that they themselves have been members of (Kendall 2002). By using sorority membership to confirm and bolster elite status, sorority membership functions as a marker of class identity, as well as a way to uphold class standards, and this is often reflected in current members' interactions (ibid). Class is also used to prevent undesirable members from joining the sorority in the first place, as sorority members use appearance based class cues to select members who look "classy" and like "a good match for [the] sorority" (Kendall 2002, Ryan 2009). In order to be an authentic member of the sorority, women must use appearance based class cues to illustrate their conformity to the ever changing standards of acceptable 'high class' styles (Peterson 2009). Lamont (2000) shows that class is more than a function of production or consumption, but is an important tool for creating and maintaining social identity. The ways that class and class cues intersect with sorority organizational identities may be particularly instructive. In the context of young college heterosexual singles, Grazian (2008) notes that college is an age

where young adults are beginning to try on adult identities. While his focus is on heterosexual identity performance, class and gender also intersect in performances of adult identities; beauty work is not only sexuality work, but gender work and class work.

Once women gain entrance to a sorority, class continues to be an issue. Ryan (2009) shows that members choose to wear the most expensive clothes and accessories that they can in order to reflect their elite position. In this manner, beauty and appearance combine with class to shape sorority group identity. Thus, sororities reflect the class-based differences in appearance visible in society as a whole. For example, women of higher socio-economic statuses tend to be slimmer, and value and idealize slimness much more than women of lower classes (Drewnowski, Kurth and Krahn 1994, Mears 2009). As sorority women tend to be from middle to upper class families, the adherence to elite standards of beauty is not surprising (Basow et al 2007, Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006).

Consumption of material goods serves as a marker or indicator of class for many individuals, including sorority women (Crane and Bovone 2006, Ryan 2009). The ability to select and purchase high end clothes, shoes, makeup and accessories can work to cement a sorority member's status and confirm her identity as a true member of the sorority. The use of material objects are just as important for conveying messages about the individual using them as the object's manifest purpose, so the display of class via consumption extends beyond the object itself (Baudrillard 1981).

For sorority women, class is most frequently expressed and displayed through consumption, which in turn becomes a key marker for organizational identity as a sorority member. Pugh (2009) analyzes consumption as belonging work among children demonstrating a culture of spending that redefines belonging as mediated through the market. The construction of fashion and appearance as having value created from interaction and shared experience joins with the cultural arrangements of meaning as expressed through the market and financial transactions (Pugh 2009, Slater 1997). The ability to purchase currently popular (and expensive) brands of shoes, handbags, makeup and clothing marks a woman as a true member of the sorority community, where appearance-related luxury goods illustrate the importance of consumption for belonging in culture where money is key (Lamont 2000). The actual consumption and purchase of said goods is secondary to the social rituals of talk and display that indicate inclusion or exclusion in the group (Collins 2004, Pugh 2009). In sororities, this talk takes the form of discussions centered around questions “where did you get that?” and “what store is that from?” Participation in this talk, or the inability to do so based on sub-standard levels of consumption determines social success in an organization that is highly conformist and appearance focused (Collins 2004, Pugh 2009). This differs slightly from Veblen, where consumption is used mainly for display only. In these situations, the act of consuming leads to item-related patterns of interactions used to forge bonds of belonging. For sorority women, maintaining and presenting an acceptable display as a member of their

sorority involves ongoing authenticity work, much of which is done through consumption and illustrates class (Kendall 2006, Lamont 2000, Peterson 2005, Pugh 2009).

Consumption of leisure activities also serves an indicator of class and belonging for many groups (Veblen). For sorority women, the ability to consume is a large part of many leisure activities, such as going out for drinks at expensive restaurants, recreational shopping, and going to the salon for manicures and pedicures. Simply having the money for these activities isn't enough to ensure acceptance and stable organizational identity- the consumption itself must be visible and evident to others in the organization (Pugh 2009).

Sorority members also express strong negative feelings towards styles linked with working and lower class statuses, much as elite women of all ages do (Arthur 1999, Bettie 2003, Hunter & Miller 1997, Ouellette 1999, Skeggs 2001, Steedman 2006). Classed femininity leads sorority women of middle or upper middle class status to shun styles coded as lower class, along with their wearers (Hunt & Miller 1997, Kendall 2002, Skeggs 2001, Steedman 2006). By doing so, sorority women mark boundaries that either allow or disallow both formal membership and informal belonging in the sorority itself (Collins 2004).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH THEMES

In this study, I analyze the ways in which sorority women enact and perform standards of appearance as part of their organizational identity as members of their particular sororities, focusing on the following themes: 1) what sorority women consider an ideal appearance 2) how this concept is upheld and maintained as a requirement for entry into the organization; 3) the importance of appearance as an organizational characteristic; 4) the impact of class and consumption on maintaining the organizational identity or 'sorority member'; 5) how women use their appearance and sorority membership to construct and display their chosen image. The general theme of this research relates to how young women who hold an identity that requires a highly idealized appearance use the practices necessary to maintain this appearance to express or display their affiliation with the sorority system and their chapter in particular. The interplay between these themes provides sorority women with a means for constructing a sense of belonging using appearance as a tool. Sorority women may deny the importance of appearance as a criterion for membership in their organization while simultaneously adhering to conventional beauty standards, or they may deny beauty standards and actively defy the strictures of appearance held by the Greek system. Women may also acknowledge the importance of appearance for identity and membership and conform to expectations of appearance, or they may acknowledge the importance of appearance while challenging these standards in their daily lives or their negotiations with appearance standards may take another form entirely.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Participant Selection

This study of sorority women at Mizzou is comprised of one-on-one qualitative interviews with twenty women from ten of the campus's fourteen sororities, including women from each tier of the sorority system's informal rankings. At the end of the research period, a fifteenth sorority re-started a chapter on campus. No members of this chapter were interviewed. Participants also completed a short closed-ended survey for demographic purposes.

Participants in this study included a diverse array of women from different sorority tiers, as well as academic class levels. The sample included six sophomores, five juniors, eight seniors, and one fifth year senior. Two former members were interviewed, providing information about sorority life from a different perspective. Sorority members came from all of the tiers of what was seen as an informal ranking system of sororities comprising a top tier, two upper tiers, a middle tier, and a bottom tier. These rankings reflected the ways sorority members saw one another in terms of reputational ideas and stereotypes about the attractiveness of each sororities members, though as I will discuss later these rankings were sometimes limited to physical attractiveness and counternarratives developed around factors other than attractiveness such as service, personality, and interactions both within sororities and between sorority members and

those outside of the Greek community. The breakdown of interview subjects is as follows:

Highest tier sorority members: Devon, Pi Omega Pi, junior; Becca, former Phi Kappa, senior. (No members from Gamma Sigma Zeta were interviewed.)

Top tier sorority members: Kate, Omega Tau Chi, sophomore; Sarah, Omega Tau Chi, sophomore; Anna, Omega Tau Chi, senior; Courtney, Omega Tau Chi, senior; Lizzie, Beta Sigma Beta, junior; Alex, Zeta Beta Alpha, junior.

Upper tier sorority members: Jen, Delta Tau Phi, sophomore; Maria, Delta Tau Phi, sophomore; Lisa, Delta Tau Phi, senior; Brynn, Delta Tau Phi, senior; Samantha, Delta Tau Phi, senior; Cara, Omega Xi, junior; Chloe, former Omega Xi, junior.

Middle tier sorority members: Stephanie, Rho Delta, sophomore. (No members of Kappa Lambda were interviewed.)

Bottom tier sorority members: Victoria, Alpha Kappa Mu, senior; Adrienne, Alpha Kappa Mu, senior; Nicole, Chi Delta, sophomore. (No members of Delta Mu or Alpha Delta Beta were interviewed.)

The largest concentration of sorority members was from upper tier sororities, particularly top tier Omega Tau Chi, and upper tier Delta Tau Phi. The oversampling of women from upper tier sororities served to form a purposive sample designed for analytical strength. Because the styles, appearance, and reputations of women in upper tier sororities form

the ideal type of a sorority member, as well as the image non-Greeks and other outsiders hold, the overrepresentation of members from these chapters allows for deeper theoretical conclusions. Additionally, the inclusion of four members from Omega Tau Chi and five members of Delta Tau Phi was designed to evaluate the level of consensus and similarity of experience within sororities, as well as between chapters.

The selected study site is a large, public, land grant university with a total enrollment of 32,000 students. The university is the largest institution of higher learning in the mid-western state in which it is located. The University of Missouri campus is an ideal locale to conduct research on sorority membership, as it is a fairly typical large Midwestern land-grant university with a high percentage of sorority members. As an archetypal American university, the Greek system at the University is well-developed, and an important social, organizational, and philanthropic force on campus. Currently, roughly 24% of Mizzou undergraduate women are members of the historically white sororities that make up the Panhellenic Association, and the campus's overall Greek participation rate is 22% (University of Missouri Office of Greek Life). Mizzou women have the opportunity to join one of fourteen sororities on campus, and this large number of Greek organizations offered ample opportunity to study beauty and identity among Greek women.

In order to analyze a range of sorority experiences, I recruited women from a variety of sororities on the Mizzou campus. Participant recruitment took place in several classes at a large public Midwestern University, including two Introduction to Sociology

courses with predominantly freshman and sophomore enrollment, as well as Youth in Today's World and Sociology of the Family, higher level courses comprised mainly of juniors and seniors. Snowball sampling was also used, as interviewees were encouraged to refer friends involved in Greek life.

The goal of selecting participants from University classes was to provide data from many different sororities, as well as to insure that participants from varying academic years participated. It is likely that different sororities have different appearance standards, as previous research has suggested. It is also likely that sorority members have different experiences based on how long they have been members of their sorority. By using participants from a variety of sorority houses, a fuller picture of sorority women and beauty standards and identity is likely to emerge. The particular involvement of six members from Delta Tau Phi and four members from Omega Tau Chi allowed me to study patterns that emerged both within and between sororities. Using data from interviews with participants from multiple sororities will allow the research to delve more broadly into the construction of beauty standards and their impact on identity for sorority women. For example, previous research has suggested that sororities are informally ranked based on both appearance and socioeconomic status of members (Arthur 1997 and 1999), and also that beauty ideals vary for women of differing socioeconomic statuses. By interviewing participants from a wide range of sororities with differing informal rankings, these correlations were evaluated with regards to the campus studied. Preliminary discussion with women from different sororities suggests general agreement

on a status hierarchy within the Greek system, with participations largely agreeing on where each house falls in an information three-tier system. Some preliminary discussions I have had with sorority women on the campus suggest general agreement on a status hierarchy within the Greek system, which prompted the inclusion of questions based on this line of thought. This hierarchy is also associated with appearances, with perceptions that higher status sororities have higher attractiveness levels and stricter codes of appearance. Detailed information about the informal sorority ranking system is located in Chapter One.

Each participant was engaged in a one-on-one interview, which made use of interview prompts, but which was largely participant driven. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed, which allowed the researcher to focus on the conversation with the participant and not to be distracted by note taking during interviews. Participants also had the option of reading their interview after transcription, though no participants requested to do so. Participants also completed a short demographic survey, which included questions that briefly assess beauty work and appearance, in addition to more standard questions, such as those evaluating age, race, and data on sorority membership. Both interview prompts and demographic survey are included in appendices at the end of this work. Participants were not financially compensated for their participation, nor do participants receive extra credit for their involvement if they were enrolled in courses offered by the researcher's department.

Precedent for Methods

Previous studies of sorority women and appearance have used qualitative methods. In a 1997 study of dress, appearance, and identity in women, Scott Hunt and Kimberly Miller chose to study sorority women based on the assumption that their attitudes would “be representative of a significant segment of larger student culture and, to some extent, a US culture that effects young, middle-class women” (Hunt & Miller 1997). The use of sorority women and the subsequent success of their study suggest that this demographic is in fact highly connected to discourses surrounding appearance, and identity, which lends support the premise of the proposed study.

In another study focused on appearance in sorority women, Linda Boynton Arthur used both interviews and observation to collect data about the construction of gender and the importance of dress and appearance therein (1999). At the onset of the study, the author administered a survey discussing sorority rankings to fifty women on the campus of the university where the study took place. Participants in the portion of the study included members of various sororities as well as independent women, all of whom showed high rater correlation in ranking sororities- high houses and low houses were rated as such based on the perceived beauty, stylishness, and socio-economic status of members (ibid). Through these activities and interviews, Arthur gathered extensive data regarding gender, appearance, and impact of sorority membership. The use of a demographic survey is of particular interest, as the resulting data confirmed that members of the high house were from families with higher socio-economic status and were

individuals with stricter ideals of femininity and appearance, suggesting a correlation between social position and internalization of beauty ideals.

To study how sorority women construct gender identity using socially acceptable strategies of female behavior and homophobia, Lauren Hamilton and her research team conducted an ethnography of freshman women residing in a college dorm at a large Midwestern university, one fairly similar to Mizzou (Hamilton 2007). Interviews included information about the position women occupied within the Greek system, and how sorority membership influenced women's views towards themselves and other women.

Hamilton's ability to gather data and formulate conclusions about the importance of adhering to hegemonic standards of identity and sexual presentation through interviews proves that is indeed possible to get a nearly complete and coherent picture of sorority women's identity strategies without attending fraternity parties or rush events (2007). The candid nature of interviewees' responses when dealing with uncomfortable issues such as sexuality and judgment of others' self-presentation is also important, as this was one of my main concerns. Hamilton also mentions that she was able to draw upon her white, upper class background in connecting with her research subjects (Hamilton 2007). This particular part of her ethnographic work is important, as I will hopefully be able to forge connections with my research subjects on similar grounds, despite not having been a member of a sorority myself.

Another mixed-methods ethnographic study of sorority women and identity was conducted by Lisa Handler, with the intention of studying how sorority women use their membership to negotiate gendered situations, and the identity characteristics of women who choose sorority membership as a viable strategy to do so (1995). Handler's main method of gathering data was through qualitative one-on-one interviews, with limited socializing with sorority members augmenting the data acquired through interviews.

Handler's ability to gather frank and honest data through interviews with limited observation further illustrates that my methodology has the potential to be quite effective. The questions she asked were very direct, and often resulted in sisters saying negative things about the sorority or upholding stereotypes that many sororities publicly try to shed, so the use of pointed questions need not be avoided out of fear of failure to get honest answers.

In a 2010 study of body objectification in sorority rush participants, Ashley Marie Rolnik, Renee Engeln-Maddox and Steven A Miller used quantitative methods to determine the level of "self-objectification...the adoption of an outsider's perspective on one's own body" of sorority rush participants (Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). Open ended questions regarding rush were also included (ibid). Despite never meeting participants and not engaging in ongoing ethnographic research, the authors were able to gather significant and intriguing data regarding sorority women and appearance, suggesting that quality data can be acquired without full ethnographic fieldwork.

In a more recent study, Helen Grace Ryan focused on social class issues and awareness among sorority women at an urban mid-western university (2009). Using demographic information and in-depth qualitative interviews in addition to other methods, Ryan's interviews of fifteen members of a single sorority provided ample data for drawing conclusions regarding members' class attitudes, a topic that often overlaps and influences both beauty ideals and identity (ibid).

Materials

Participants completed a brief demographic survey designed to provide background data, which enabled generalization of results and provided additional insight into the impact appearance has on identity development in sorority members. Interview prompts and the demographic survey are both available in the materials appendix at the end of this work.

An extensive interview template was written for use in interviews. The questions include questions on the nature of beauty, what in particular is beautiful, what means must a woman employ to maintain to become beautiful, and how standards of beauty are created. Questions relating specifically to sorority membership standards regarding appearance and performance are included as well. Emphasis will be placed on the participant's sorority versus other sororities on campus, in an attempt to examine the degree to which individual organizations vary in their use of beauty and appearance standards as requisites for belonging. Participants were asked if/how they display sorority

membership, as well as their motivations for doing so, and specific instances in which their sorority membership was displayed. In addition to these questions, participants were asked how their interactions with others contribute to their construction of and implementation of appearance ideals and standards, and seeing if patterns emerge within groups of women the same age or in the same sororities.

The goal of the demographic survey and interview questions was to solicit responses that illustrate how sorority members use appearance standards as a method of displaying belonging in their sororities, in addition to their membership.

CHAPTER 5: THE IMPORTANCE OF APPEARANCE

The Importance of Appearance in Society and Sorority Life

Everyone wants to look good; everyone... I feel like obviously you want like people that are representing something you are a part of to not look like crap all the time either but I don't think anyone would ever be like "Hey, you need to like fix your hair" or something, you know, but I just think it's important in our sorority but it's also important just like in college in general.

As Samantha says, everyone wants to look good, and to be a part of a group that looks good as well. In the case of sorority women at the University of Missouri, individual appearance combines with the overall appearance of other members of a woman's sorority to shape both individual identity and the organizational identity as a whole. In order for women to maintain a suitable and satisfactory appearance and image as a sorority woman, the whole of their sorority chapter needs to do likewise. While 'everyone' in college wants to look good, not all sorority women hold the same standards for what looking good means. The divergent constructions of acceptable and idealized appearance in different sororities shapes not only the identities of sororities as organizations, but also allows sorority members to draw identity distinctions based on membership in their particular chapters. Although sorority women draw their reference points of ideal appearance from the larger society, their location in the Greek system at Mizzou provides a more accurate context for their views on appearance. Past studies consistently indicate that sorority women consider a suitably feminine appearance hugely important, and as they are considered more attractive than other college women, they

may be considered successful in their endeavors (Anderson 2001, Atlas & Morier 1994, Basow et al 2007, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). In order for a sorority woman to construct a suitable sorority identity for both herself and her sisters, a carefully crafted appearance is critical. Sorority women use the interplay between appearance and belonging as a primary tool in defining and illustrating their membership in the Greek community in general, and in their individual chapter in particular.

When sorority women are asked about the importance of appearance, two distinct and contradictory trends emerge. First, sorority women report a heightened awareness of conventionally unattractive women, with reactions ranging from pity and sympathy to more overtly negative views. Their narratives weave ideals of femininity, the importance of appearance for success, the potential for change that is highlighted in women's magazines and other forms of media. For example, Courtney discusses the importance of appearance in making a positive first impression:

I guess you would call it, is that first impressions are everything. First impressions like when you go on a job interview, when you are in a bar or social setting and you meet people. I think that you want to present yourself in a certain way. For example, as far as like beauty stereotypes, I was told one day and I have a great family, a loving family and my mom one day was like "Courtney, don't leave the house without makeup because you never know who you are going to run into". This is my own mother saying this. She is not materialistic or anything like that but she just said, you know, always think about your appearance because that is how you're initially perceived by others. So I think it absolutely is for sure. I mean, especially on Facebook and everything like, my gosh, if you don't get a boy and they are with a new girl and you see that girl on Facebook; like "she is gross", you know so.

Kimberly concurs, discussing how dictates of female appearance often come from men, and as a result, effort expended on maintaining a suitably feminine appearance is a wise choice:

I feel like when talking about jobs and things like that, it's really important. Because I think that since it is still kind of like a man's world, that if you're a woman who is attractive, I feel like you can go further with guys and like get hired for different jobs. Because I feel like guys are always going to be very superficial like that. And I'm all about girls wearing pencil skirts as opposed to dress pants and like using their sexuality, I guess, because it's like, well if it's that easy for guys to see that and would hire me over someone who dressed more conservatively...well, not that a pencil skirt is unconservative...but like dressing feminine and like trying to use your femininity...But I feel like a lot of times, whenever just put makeup on and dress in nice-fitting clothes, it automatically like elevates them to a different attractiveness level, I guess.

The importance that Courtney and Kimberly (and their families) place on appearance serves to draw distinctions between those 'care' about self-presentation, and those who seem to choose to not tailor their appearances in order to convey what these women would consider a positive, and necessary, first impression. This narrative was echoed by the majority of sorority members interviewed, highlighting the extent to which appearance plays a large role in shaping a sorority member's desired identity.

Alex, Samantha, and Chloe take this a step further, discussing how society's focus on appearance has impacted their own lives. In Alex's experience, appearance impacts who she (and others) befriend, because "[y]ou are more likely, whether you are conscious of it or not, to want to be friends with someone who is, like, physically attractive. You are naturally drawn to that person. I think that I something that just happens. It is not

something that is emphasized.” Although this may not be something that is emphasized explicitly, or acknowledged directly, women reported being aware of the advantages of being conventionally attractive. As Alex puts it, “well, our society is shallow and like I feel like beauty gets people very far like just like you know like more attractive people are more likely to get jobs and things like that just because they are pretty. And like I know that I have gotten away with a lot of things just for being a girl like being like decent looking.” Chloe also reports reaping the benefits of her conventional good looks, saying “I mean I think that you have so many more advantages if you, I mean, I feel it, you know, like I think I am an attractive person. I more so think that because I have been told that.”

Women also report a noticing the degree to which others meet conventional standards of appearance, frequently discussing their reactions in terms of the potential and need for makeovers and changes. Samantha does “find prettiness in everyone”, but at the same time, her focus is drawn to how that person’s appearance can be enhanced.

Like I always like play like makeover in my mind. Like, you know, I feel like I can find prettiness in like everyone and like just some people just don’t know how to like bring it out – like you said – some people just don’t wear flattering clothes for their bodies or like if you just like have your teeth whitened or like, you know, something like that, you would look better. I don’t like feel bad for them I just wish like – I feel anyone can look at least decent.

Adrienne analyzed the situation of appearance as a social and employment booster far more critically, using the example of an acquaintance, saying that “she is not smart and people that are smarter than her will go far but she still has the opportunity to go pretty

far herself because luckily she is attractive and people will hire her for a job she doesn't necessarily deserve."

Chloe says "there are probably so many other things that you have better to offer that are much more important than the way that you look, you know. It is not that important to me", but at the same time, she acknowledges that those who [are] "walking around with their you know, like they don't brush their hair, they have holes in their clothes or they have yellow teeth and teeth falling out like then it's like – okay come on, like if you want to get a job then like you probably should clean yourself up a little bit." Her contradictory remarks about how appearance doesn't matter in her mind, but at the same time, people should "clean [themselves] up" if they don't fit into an idealized appearance are echoed over and over by other women. In reference to the salience of appearance for success during sorority recruitment, as members of their sorority, and in general, women frequently talked about appearance taking a backseat to personality and other traits. However, when elaborating, women tended to move beyond the socially acceptable narratives that acknowledge that "it's what inside that counts" focusing explicitly on strict physical standards for appearance. Though sorority women may indicate that sub-standard appearances are acceptable, their personal descriptions of particular actions and incidents reveal otherwise, especially during sorority recruitment, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Other women did mention viewing other women as unattractive, but also couched this acknowledgement in terms of sympathy, and in Courtney's case, empathy. Both Kate

and Courtney are attractive women who belong to the top tier sorority Omega Chi. Kate reports her experiences with judging others' appearances, and the guilt she often feels in doing so.

I'll like notice if someone is unconventional or whatever in their appearance and, I don't know, I'm just kind of like, "Eww." I don't know, I feel like I try really hard not to have those thoughts, you know? Like I kind of scold myself if I do because I don't think that's okay and that is one of the main things in conversation with other people I hate when people make comments on peoples' appearances and are like, "Oh, they're not attractive." That really bothers me...It's just I like wonder what they think about themselves. I wonder if they are insecure and I feel sorry for them.

Courtney draws on her past insecurity prior to her breast reduction, and uses her experiences to describe how despite being aware of the important of appearance in the Greek system and her sorority in particular, she still feels connected to the unattractive outsiders.

I by a lot of standards was conventionally unattractive. I never had a boyfriend in high school; I mean I went to an all girl school but still but I was not the type of girl that boys were lining up to go to a dance with. So for me now, I see those girls and I'm just like "I get you. I understand you". And I just still feel like that girl in a lot of ways. So that's why it bothers me so much when I'll hear, you know, sorority friends or something talk smack about some girl walking down the street when like I relate to her; it's me, you know.

While women report negative focus on their own, and others' looks, when asked to describe the "ideal beautiful woman", the majority of women use personality traits rather than physical traits, with confidence being the most frequently listed characteristic.

“A woman who is confident in herself. Someone that makes their outward appearance reflect their inward personality no matter the social consequences.” Adrienne, AMu

“A beautiful woman is someone who is confident in their body no matter what size or shape.” Anna, Omega Chi

“Challenges herself, is confident, and is selfless/gives to others.” Courtney, Omega Chi

“Someone who is confident in their appearance no matter what they have on their body.” Becca, former Phi Kap

“Has a sense of style that’s on point, but doesn’t cost a billion dollars. Extremely confident and comfortable with herself.” Chloe, former Omega Xi

“The ideal beautiful woman reflects the authenticity...of her personality through her appearance. The internal self is the external self in presentation and demeanor.” Alex, Alpha

“The ideal beautiful woman is confident in her abilities. On the physical aspect, she is beautiful just the way she is.” Maria

“Someone that is confident in who she is. Someone that has goals in life. Someone that keeps up with their appearance.” Devon, Pi Omega Pi

“Confident, well groomed, tall, toned.” Kimberly, DTPhi

Despite this idealistic focus on personality, when sorority women did use physical descriptors, they lined up with hegemonic white, upper middle class standards of female beauty.

“Thin, clear skin, big eyes that are any color besides brown.” Cara, Omega Xi

“She would be tall, long hair, perfect smile, and good skin.” Kate, Omega Chi

“Toned body and dark hair with blue eyes. Decent sized boobs/butt.” Samantha, DTPhi

“Size 2 with blonde hair and about 5’6” in height.” Lisa, DTPhi

“Healthy, average height, average weight, long hair, pretty face, good personality.” Sarah, Omega Chi

“I guess the ideal woman is someone with long blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin and who wears a size zero or two. She’d have clear skin, would be thin, but would probably have large breasts.” Stephanie, Rho Delta

The dimensions of appearance discussed, namely those for weight, body type, hair color and length, were also those that sorority women used most frequently when talking about standards their chapter set for members and potential new members. Again, while sorority women often used an idealistic narrative that focused on the value of confidence, intelligence, and kindness, they generally returned to a hegemonic description of idealized that image that was heavily dependent on strict physical standards. The interplay between appearance and belonging is tightly interwoven, with very little room for deviance from the current hegemonic norm. In order to use their appearance as a method for forging and displaying belonging to their organizations, sorority members must engage in an extensive amount of beauty and body work.

Dimensions of Appearance for Sorority Members

For sorority women and many other young white women who adhere to hegemonic standards of beauty, weight, makeup, clothes and accessories take the forefront in determining whether or not one has a desirable appearance.

Weight and body size are the subject of worry for many, if not most, American women and men, but a combination of factors make this issue more pressing for women

in the Greek system. Because sorority women report valuing a more feminine identity and appearance, they also valued the slim body type associated with femininity (Arthur 1997, Arthur 1999, Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006). Body image issues and desire for a thin figure are also linked with upper class, white ideals of beauty, which are especially salient for the middle to upper class members of predominantly white Panhellenic sororities (Kendall 2002, Mears 2009, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox, and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009). For many sorority women, the significance of conforming to a slim ideal begins during recruitment, where women who don't fit the ideal are often summarily dismissed from many chapters, especially top tier houses.

When asked about what her chapter does when voting on an overweight member, former Omega Chi rush chair Courtney said "I think everyone just knows that maybe it wouldn't be the best fit for her but no one has ever made any comments about, you know, jokes or anything." When asked to elaborate on what would happen if that particular rushee had great grades, was involved, and thought that Omega Chi was the right place for her, Courtney said that her sorority tried to invite back everyone who wanted to return after the first round, but by the second round, such a women would likely be cut from the house. Courtney later said that overall, "there aren't many overweight people in the Greek system". Despite her attempts to speak positively about her chapter's treatment of overweight women, her comments highlight the contradiction between the idealized standards and the practiced standards of appearance for women in the sorority system, as well as the appearance-based distinctions between sororities. Though no one would laugh

or make jokes or be overtly to a Potential New Member (PNM) who was overweight, the discretion shown by top-tier “beauty queen” house Omega Chi does not change that fact that those women who did not fit a narrow model of appearance were excluded from membership without delay. Additionally, by stating that while Omega Chi wasn’t the “right place” for an overweight or unattractive PNM, Courtney drew a distinction between her chapter and others, which would be more welcoming to someone who did not meet her chapter’s requirements for membership. Omega Chi worked to maintain its reputation as the “beauty queen house”, as Courtney put it somewhat ironically, by dismissing those who physically wouldn’t be a good fit. Other chapters with less stringent requirements for members’ appearance and without reputations for beautiful members provided such rushees with other opportunities for membership in the Greek system, albeit in a lower ranked chapter. Courtney was the first and only woman interviewed who stated this directly, though many other people alluded to it, or attempted to address it circuitously. The difference between appearance standards in different sororities illustrates the interactional nature of the interplay between belonging and physical appearance. While overweight or less attractive women may find it difficult to join Omega Chi or another elite sorority through conventional means, there are other ways for these women to find belonging in the Greek system.

Those who are overweight or not conventionally attractive and want to be in top tier houses find access limited unless they are the daughter or sister of a member, and then, even though they gain entrance to the chapter itself, they may find themselves on

the outskirts of social life, lest they bring down the overall reputation of the organization.

According to Chloe, heavier or less attractive Omega Xi legacies

...might kind of be in their own group. Um, I think that they might not fit into the whole like even within the sorority. I definitely think that other people would not go out of their way to be like “Do you guys want to go with us?” You know, like I think it would be like “We are all going out like we always do” and like if they were out at the bar, they probably would be like “Whoa, what are they doing here” you know and like they might say hello but like after that, chances are they are not going to like really accept them.

Once a member of a sorority, weight continues to be a central part of a woman’s appearance and a determinant of her identity as a member of the organization. In casually discussing dressing to go out, Cara made an offhand comment about the benefits of living with so many others: “It was like a big communal closet which was pretty cool a lot of times. But other times, you wouldn’t get your stuff back and that kind of sucked. But if you kept track of things, it was really great. I liked that part.” When asked if everyone in her sorority was in the same size range, and thus able to participate in sharing clothes, Cara said that “we were all pretty much the same size” both confirming weight as an entrance criterion and also a factor in the enjoyment of the perks of sorority life. Alex also discussed the importance of maintaining an acceptable weight as a member of Alpha. She observed that “going through recruitment and everyone was about my size”, which she found interesting given “with the rise in obesity rates in America.” However, she went on to say that in her sorority, there was no

Obsession of being thin and that kind of thing, and I have never had any kind of pressure living in Alpha for that. In fact, it is like, I don’t know, I was thinking

about that. Last night, our chef surprised us with Alaskan crab, for example. And I was so excited. And girls were getting three or four helpings, or something, of this because we never get it. It's like a \$30 meal at a restaurant? And we loved it. And just like within ourselves, where we would just like to skip that second helping, whatever, but at the same time, it is like we have our workout buddies, you know, to balance it out. It is like there is no unhealthy pressure, I think.

Like Cara, Alex's experience didn't illustrate a forced focus on weight maintenance, but instead an ongoing, subtle acknowledgement of the necessity of remaining thin in order to fit in with other members of the sorority. Though members of Alpha never experienced direct or overt pressure to remain thin, the underlying importance of adhering to a slim ideal is clear through Alex's happy recollection of Alaskan crab at dinner showed that there is indeed pressure for many sorority women. Her comments indicate that despite a lack of "unhealthy" pressure, she and her sorority sisters were only able to indulge in extra helpings because of the existence of their workout partners. Despite the lack of voiced "obsession with being thin" in Alpha, the ongoing, underlying knowledge and presence of established workout partners illustrate the high degree to which thin ideals are internalized in the sorority system.

Several women also spoke about how eating disorders were present, but not directly addressed in their sororities. Courtney said that in Omega Chi, "We had some eating disorders in house which, it breaks my heart". One particular sister of Courtney's received extra pressure from her mother, who Courtney described as a trophy wife to the woman's NHL star father.

Since this girl's mom, absolute trophy wife, right? The pressure I saw her put on

her daughter. Her daughter was the one we found throwing up in the first floor bathroom. This girl would spend hours at the rec center all because of her mother. She would tell her mother it was for her mother and she is so petite as it is but it was just crazy to see. You know, her mother would come in and make comments to her and I thought is this really happening right now.

The pressure to adhere to hegemonic standards conventional attractiveness is particularly strong for upper middle or upper class white women, the same demographic that makes up the majority of sorority women (Kendall 2002). Stephanie, who was recovering from a serious eating disorder that had resulted in her being hospitalized while in high school, was particularly cognizant of the salience of weight in the sorority system. She described an incident that both illustrated the impact her history of disordered eating had on her, and also highlighted the importance of weight for her sorority sisters.

So I had a really bad past with body images. I was anorexic in high school and I still have issues with it, even though it is not as bad now, but...so it's something I deal with pretty much every day. In high school I weighed myself five times a day every day. So when I came to college that was the first time that I did not have a scale. And I don't have a car here, so I couldn't go buy one either. So it was kind of like a clean break... It was so hard for me the first semester of college. And when I went home, at Thanksgiving the first thing I did was like literally run to the scale. But now I'm terrified to go near it, because I just don't want to know. So it's like it had the opposite effect on me. So when I moved into Rho Delta, I had been a whole year without one. I went home for the summer, and by that point I was in the state of mind where I didn't need it anymore.

So I came and there are like two bathrooms. There is a third floor bathroom and a second floor. So I lived on the third floor the first semester and there was no scale in there, so I never even noticed it, until second semester when I moved to the second floor and there was a scale in there. I was like "oh my God." It was just like a bad trigger for me because I had been having really like...being really self-conscious and maybe this semester I will diet, or whatever, because everyone in the sorority house is dieting for spring break during second semester. So I was like...so I started having these bad thoughts, and I was like, wait. I had to stop myself and I took myself out of the moment and I was like, well I have to get rid

of the scale. And I knew it belonged to the house because it was old, and it was one of the ones that, like it wasn't even digital. It was like one of the ones.....
[with dials]

And that is exactly the type I had at my house too, so for me those are more comfortable for some reason than the digital ones. I don't know why. So it felt like my one at home and I was like "oh no." This was really bad. So it was during syllabus week when everyone was going out, and I started working for the Missourian the newspaper and Vox [magazine] that semester, so I already had an article to write. So I wasn't going out with everyone. So I was one of the only people in the house and I was like that was a good opportunity. It was one of my first days there. And I had a shopping bag that I found lying in the hallway and I just put it in there and ran it down into the basement. We have a recruitment closet where we keep everything for recruitment. And it was so messy and I was like "no one is going to find it in here." So I put it under a shelf in the recruitment closet, like way in the back. I had to climb over all this stuff to even get it back there. So I came upstairs and I was feeling happy about it and I was like "I just did that" or whatever.

So that was at night. I think it was on a Tuesday. So Wednesday, the next day, I go on Facebook at 1:00pm and this girl had posted, she was like...and this was in January, too...so she's like "whoever took the scale out of the second floor bathroom needs to put it back because some girls are trying to get skinny for spring break and we need that." It was literally, probably, it was less than 24 hours for sure. Maybe less than 12. I could not believe that someone noticed that fast, so that kind of concerned me, that like...I don't know, because I knew how dependent I was on it and I was just like "oh my God." And so all of a sudden everyone is talking about the scale. It becomes this drama on the second floor. I'd be in the bathroom and people would be like "oh, where is the scale. What happened to it?" I was just like...I obviously don't say anything. I could not believe that. People were so concerned. And it really frustrated me. And my parents obviously knew about my issues and I had told my mom. I wasn't going to tell her that I did that, because my parents tend to overreact every single time I talk about my body image they think that I'm going into a relapse or whatever. So I try not to talk to them about it. But I told them about that and I was just like, I just cannot believe that less than 12 hours later someone is asking where the scale is. I was really frustrated. So I didn't put it back and it is still in the recruitment closet. And the girl who posted on the Facebook wall...and a ton of people like it too, the post, so that was concerning. And no one even defended it. And people were like "yeah, where is it?" And then two days later she posts "but seriously, where's the scale?" And she is like this really skinny girl. So I was just like frustrated. And she went out and bought one with her own money. And now that's in there. I couldn't take it because that'd be stealing and she bought it

with her own money, but for the one at least that belonged to the house, I felt like I paid to live here and so did these girls, so I can move it. I didn't get rid of it. I just moved it.

It is a digital one, so I don't like those to begin with. But, I mean, did I go step on it after she bought it? Yeah. But at the same time...So, I don't know. It's just like I hate scales to begin with, but that whole incident made me want to move out of the house immediately. It was so uncomfortable for me. Like, when everyone was talking about the scale and all these girls who are like skinnier than me, I was like "well, should I be worried then?" It was just so unnerving. Especially when everyone is dieting for spring break, a couple weeks before that I could not even live in the house. I couldn't eat there. I had to go eat after everyone else had already eaten because girls were so annoying, about different things. Like whatever was for dinner, "oh, well we can't eat that because we have to be ready for PCB and get in our bikinis."

Stephanie related this story with a great deal of passion and emotion, mainly pride in her ability to handle a situation that she felt was harmful to both her and her sorority sisters, several of whom she described as having issues with disordered eating. As a member of her sorority, Stephanie worked hard to make sure that size was not an issue for members of Rho Delta; however, as this incident indicates, her efforts were ineffective overall, compared to the constant pressure of the thin ideal. In this incident, prompted by Stephanie's abnormally drastic resistance, appearance related social control was rendered far more overt. Compared with the normal unvoiced pressure and internalized value of thinness, the challenge presented by hiding the scale brought her sorority's views on acceptable weight and appearance to the forefront. In fact, Stephanie was referred to be interviewed specifically due to this incident. Her best friend Sarah, a member of Omega Chi, asked Stephanie to join the study because of her decisive action in hiding the scale, something Sarah said she couldn't even imagine happening in her sorority. Social control

regarding appearance normally remained strong yet subtle in sororities outside of recruitment, with women encouraging each other to work out, or the joy experienced in sharing small sized clothes with sorority sisters. Only when these strong underlying messages about the importance of weight and appearance were challenged did overt statements about the necessity of a suitably thin and attractive appearance for belonging emerge.

The significance of clothing in gaining entrance to a sorority world also highlighted the importance of knowing the “right” brands and styles, a knowledge that is often predicated on class background. For example, Kimberly mentioned the importance of first appearance it “says a lot and it is also like more memorable. It is like, “oh, I know I talked to five girls, but the only one I really remember is that girl in the Lily Pulitzer dress” She went on to discuss the preppy, upscale brand and the role it played in indicating belonging in the sorority: “And every girl that would like walk into our houses and have one of those dresses on during recruitment they’d be like “oh so-and-so has a Lily Pulitzer dress on. Isn’t she so cute?” Like it didn’t really matter what she actually looked like, but it was like “she has the sorority style” like she knows how to dress.” The use of ideal “sorority styles” during rush conveys the ability a particular woman has to belong, and to fit in to a sorority.

Knowing how to dress and present one’s self appropriately also encompassed strict standards of hair and makeup. Over and over, women mentioned the time they spent straightening their hair, and the extent to which these standards were particularly

important at rush. Becca talked about the strict standards Phi Kappa had for members' hair during rush: "Our hair had to be down long; actually, I'm pretty sure they wanted it long." In Missouri in August, long straight hair involved a great deal of work to maintain. Courtney explained how during rush at Omega Chi, members lined up to have others tease their hair in order to get the perfect "sorority look". At the same time, women talked about Potential New Members who went through rush with "greasy" hair, or hair that was dyed "tacky" colors, and how that was notable and worthy of negative attention.

Sorority Tiers and Appearance

While official sorority rankings are based on grades, participation, and success in Homecoming and Greek Week events, informal campus rankings and reputations are largely based on the physical appearance of a sorority. On mygreekgossip.com, an anonymous website where members of the Greek system post stories, insults, and evaluations of fraternities and sororities, the informal rankings echo the discussions on campus. Women who rate others' assessment of how attractive members of their sorority are report appearance being more important to their identities, and their sorority membership being more important to their identity. This occurs most frequently in houses ranked in the top tiers of the sorority system. These women in top tier houses illustrate the extent to which appearance is a crucial component of forging belonging. For women in these chapters, the maintaining of a highly attractive physical self not only serves as a sense of individual pride, but also as a source of pride in their sorority chapter. However, women who are members of chapters with negative reputations frequently display a high

degree of pride in their sororities, and a high degree of focus on the positive traits that distinguish their chapters from others.

Top tier houses, the sororities “that everyone wants to get in to” have strong reputations of members who are either extremely attractive, or wealthy, or both. There was significant agreement about how sororities rank informally. The three houses that consistently are ranked as top tier are Pi Omega Pi (Pi Omega Pi), Gamma Sigma Beta (Gamma Sig), and Phi Kappa (Phi Kap). According to Victoria, a member of bottom tier house AMu, “I would say that the elite sororities would be Phi Kappa, Gamma Sigma Beta, Pi Omega Pi.” However, though Gamma Sig and Pi Omega Pi are highly desirable houses, known for the most attractive sorority members on campus, their members aren’t universally highly regarded. The overall consensus was that the women in these chapters are very attractive, but in a “cheap” and “slutty” way. For example, Chloe compared her sorority, Omega Xi, with these others “[we’re] not like Pi Omega Pi which is like super hot girls but not very smart; not like Gamma Sig’s super hot girls really dumb but it’s like those are the girls the guys want to hang out with, those are the girls who are really fun and there are a lot of cute girls.” Becca, a former member of top tier house Phi Kappa, described one of the other top houses’ members thusly:

Gamma Sig’s are stereotypically known for wearing short skirts and a lot of cleavage, kind of very tight clothing with big old stilettos and teasing hair is alright but there is like talking like a Snookie size like mountain of hair on top of your head; that is kind of like the joke being overly, overly tan kind of that was something that was talked about with Gamma Sig’s cause it was more like they looked like bimbos which is not a nice thing to say but that’s kind of the stereotype that we were not necessarily wanting to be a part of...Kind of cheap.

Yeah, I would say cheap. Even though some of their clothes might have been – I am sure expensive – but you couldn't identify them as expensive and they just looked kind of slutty.

According to Samantha, “Pi Omega Pi and Gamma Sig are the most concerned with their appearances”. Also, members of these two “are really the ones that have a specific kind of thing going on.” Lizzie, a member of Beta Sigma Beta, illustrates the “specific look” of a blonde, tan, Pi Omega Pi wearing revealing clothing:

Like last night – this is just kind of a random example of like Greek week and there was an event quiz bowl which is like the jeopardy version and my friends were on it and so I was going and stuff like that but we were just walking to the event and there was a girl who was I guess I can say it, a Pi Omega Pi and you could tell she was a Pi Omega Pi because (1) she was ridiculously tan, ridiculously blonde, she was wearing a Pi Omega Pi shirt which was a giveaway... and she was wearing these shorts and her but cheeks were hanging out of them. Lizzie and her Beta sisters all commented and laughed to themselves about this particular outfit, also saying, that even had she not been wearing a Pi Omega Pi shirt, “we would have been able to tell like she's a Pi Omega Pi.” Victoria stated the stereotypical reputations even more simply: “they're all the slutty ones and all the prettiest girls”. Devon, a member of Pi Omega Pi, agreed that “we're an attractive sorority”, but at the same time mentioned that whenever we rush we try to be real and try to be not fake and we don't, you know, I don't know. We have...I don't know. But I think that girls feel comfortable around us just because we are real and we try to make that a point in rush and stuff, like not to talk about materialistic things because that is kind of a reputation that we have and just talking to them like they're normal people.

In addition to the “hot, tan brunettes” of Gamma Sig, and the “hot, tan blondes” of Pi Omega Pi, the highest tier of sororities includes Phi Kappa, a house known for wealthy members, and notorious for asking rushees about their fathers' occupations during rush. “Phi Kappa...money, money so, you know, labeled, I've heard.” This comment from

upper class Courtney, a member of Omega Chi, was echoed by her good friend Becca, a former member of Phi Kappa.

Phi Kap is different in that they are considered like daddies' girls it is kind of like not money maybe more so than some other sororities, it is kind of expected and thrown around a little bit in other sororities. Daddy's girl – well first of all that Phi Kap daddy's girl that was kind of like the pride logon in a sorority which is hilarious but it was also true like people would like consider them daddies' girls ; you know, like they would say it. I mean by daddy's girl I mean that daddy will get you out of trouble and he will pay for what you need which is fine.

As Becca came from a lower middle class household where her father had passed away when she was very young, she did not fit this stereotype at all, something that hampered her ability to be included the Phi Kappa lifestyle and eventually led to her leaving her sorority.

Close to these three sororities were Omega Tau Chi (Omega Chi), Beta Sigma Beta (Beta), and Zeta Beta Alpha (Alpha). These three top houses had very different and far more positive reputations. While Omega Chi is known as the “beauty queen house”, the style of beauty Omega Chi women followed is widely considered to be far more “classy”, and “put together” than that of women in Pi Omega Pi and Gamma Sig. Kate, an Omega Chi, felt that her house ranked “high up there”, based on “how friendly everyone is and probably how attractive everyone is”. This stands in direct contrast with the “slutty”, overdone appearance of members of Pi Omega Pi and Gamma Sig. When describing her sorority, Sarah said “I would say we are probably one of the top houses, it's just because we don't do anything with homecoming and stuff, we kind of get

knocked down for that... We're usually, they say, like top tier. Top tier houses, or sometimes we're upper mid, upper middle tier."

Beta, Omega Chi's rival, has a similar reputation of popular, desirable women, who are "preppy up the wazoo", but fit well within the confines of an upper middle class appearance. Lizzie, a junior member, also used the narrative of classy women when describing her chapter, saying

I feel like people feel like there are some sororities where there are the girls you take home for the night but Betas are the girls you take home to mom and stuff like that, kind of like classy . I know that's not necessarily for every member but I would like to think that we like present ourselves well, not in a stuck up way, I would hope, at all but yeah, just like I said, down to earth.

Finally, Alpha's reputation is based largely on their excellent performance academically, their involvement on campus, and the sense of class and dignity with which the members comport themselves. Lizzie described Alphas as "really smart and really like, I don't know, just overachievers". Courtney concurred, saying "They are very well-rounded, smart girls." These top tier sororities value the classic "sorority look", very close to the ideal appearance for middle and upper middle class white women. Their reputations are positive, not only based on their attractive members, but also for their members' carefully crafted "classy" presentation of self.

Other upper tier sororities are known for members who are both attractive and fun. Omega Xi (Omega Xi) and Delta Tau Phi (DTPhi) have excellent reputations, and are widely considered to be attractive women who are also fun to be around. Omega Xi

women tend to have a more eclectic sense of style, and include more “hippie” preppy women. They are highly regarded for being “chill” pretty girls who frat guys “love to hang out with”. According to Cara, Omega Xi is a “top tier” sorority, made up of “a lot of girls [who are] more laid back and don’t take the whole sorority thing super seriously.” Chloe describes her former sorority’s ranking as high, saying, “those are the girls who are really fun and there are a lot of cute girls, too, you know, but, yeah, really high.” “DTPhi, highly regarded for winning Homecoming and Greek Week frequently, is perceived as a prestigious house with fun, sporty members, who also care about their appearances. According to Courtney, “DTPhi – sporty like they always win Greek Week games because they are amazing on the soccer field.” Kimberly’s description of her sorority referenced other chapters that were ranked similarly, emphasizing the traits valued in the Greek community: “I feel like we’re compared to Alpha and Omega Xi a lot, because they have similar...they like hold GPA really high and they are also really competitive in all these different events, so I feel like the three of us are always in competition.” Lisa accentuated the importance of sisterhood in DTPhi, saying “I feel like I could walk up to anyone in any pledge class for the most part and be like “oh, what are you doing tonight?” Like “Oh, let’s all go out. Let’s all have fun together.”

Middle tier sororities receive less attention, and have less specific stereotypes. Very few women mentioned Kappa Lambda, beyond saying that the members are “good girls” and their house is “diverse” including both very attractive and more average looking women. Every woman interviewed who mentioned KL talked about having a

good friend in the house, all of whom were spoken of highly. Stephanie described her chapter, Rho Delta as “stereotypically the fun, down to earth girls.” Rho Delta has various reputations, including “crazy party girls” and “average plain Janes”, but no widely recognized image either in or out of the Greek system.

Finally, four houses occupy the bottom tier of the sorority system. Chi Delta and Alpha Delta Beta had negative reputations, but not as strongly negative as Delta Mu and Alpha Kappa Mu (AMu). Victoria, an AMu, encapsulated the Greek community’s view about these houses, saying “The rest that are remaining are like Alpha Delta Beta, us, Delta Mu...we’re just kind of there.” Chi Delta members were actually considered attractive, however, perceived negatively because they are “the Pi Omega Pi wannabes” who are considered catty, backstabbing and having “no sisterhood”, meaning the women in the house don’t get along well. Jen described seeing Chi Deltas on campus and recognizing them both by look and behavior “like, overteased hair, way skimpier clothes than the norm, which is saying something, and for some reason, whenever I see Chi Deltas they seem to be in a fight.” According to Courtney, “Alpha Delta Beta is like social suicide. I don’t know how to say it appearance wise. It is merely the girl that you wouldn’t normally think would go Greek.” While neither “popular” nor “well sought out” the negative views of Alpha Delta Beta were rarely phrased in insulting terms.

On the very bottom of the social spectrum, Delta Mu and Alpha Kappa Mu are considered to be “reject” houses, full of “fat girls”. Delta Mu actually has a worse reputation, with no one mentioning anything positive about the chapter, only commenting

on how the members are either perceived to be unattractive, or are in fact unattractive. AMu members are widely considered to be unattractive, but given the sorority's new position on campus, the women received some respect for starting up a new chapter. According to Maria, "AMu, I like them. Most girls don't like them because they aren't very established here, but I liked them because they were very down to earth." Other sorority women also complimented the diversity in appearance and style of members in AMu. While they would not have approved this diversity within their own chapters, the existence of AMu provided an opportunity to express tolerance and prove that there does exist diversity in appearance within the Greek system.

Most women interviewed agreed with the same basic tiers of sororities, though there were some differences in which houses dominated which particular tiers. Regardless of whether a woman was a member of a top tier house or a bottom tier house, she acknowledged the position her chapter held accurately based on the overall consensus provided by interviewees, campus talk, and mygreekgossip.com. Women also agreed that while academic performance and involvement did have an effect on informal rankings, the main criterion was looks. The frequent mention of being able to tell which chapter a woman belonged to based on her appearance illustrates the extent to which appearance connects to belonging. Sororities who valued their chapters' physical reputations, whether stereotyped as "classy" or "flashy" sought to maintain these images via careful maintenance of appearance in current members, and focus on appearance in recruiting new members.

Moving beyond Appearance in Tiered Sorority Identity

Despite appearance being the most salient characteristic in determining where a sorority ranks in the informal prestige hierarchy of the Mizzou Greek system, sorority women themselves look beyond their chapters' ranking in shaping their identities as sorority members. For example, Adrienne, the proud former president of AMu, talked about how while those in the Greek community tend to view her sisters as unattractive, she and other members of the chapter choose to focus on the positive aspects of their reputation:

I think that we are kind of weird in that I think that we may be perceived better outside of the Greek community than within the Greek community because girls join later or they didn't have a friend in a sorority or they just like join later so they made friends outside and most of their friends aren't Greek and so then they think like oh, those girls are fun. Those girls aren't stuck up. Those girls because I have this friend that is in it whereas within the Greek community, we are still kind of, we are getting there. I think that people don't knock us because we are trying. I think they think that like we are just a group of girls that are really like trying to build ourselves up in a sorority and so generally we are perceived pretty well.

Victoria agreed, acknowledging the Greek community's consensus about her chapter, but easily dismissing it as well:

Well, in my opinion I would say we're right at the top. Just because we are so diverse, it is something that other houses I don't think have. Just because there are so many different types of people that like work so well, and it's nice to expose yourself to different types of people instead of just joining something to be the same. But in everyone else's eyes I would say we're somewhere near the bottom.

The characteristics of AMu that others used to rank the house at the bottom of the

sorority tier system were seen as positives for both Victoria and Adrienne. Both women stated that they never would have joined a “regular” sorority, as the focus on appearance didn’t appeal to them. Adrienne, a very conventionally attractive and involved senior, specifically said that she “didn’t want to be forced into their beauty standards”, when speaking of other sororities. As members of a bottom tier chapter in its fourth year on campus, both Adrienne and Victoria found their sisters to be more attractive than their reputations would indicate, but also felt that appearance was irrelevant for what really mattered as a sorority member. Adrienne, who chose AMu specifically so she wouldn’t “have to worry about feeling pretty” all the time, viewed her house extremely positively, saying “I have gotten such a good experience out of it and I love my chapter and they have done so much for me as a person and it has just made me so much stronger.” Victoria justified her pride in her identity as an AMu, saying that although many people on campus considered women in her sorority unattractive or dorky, she found value and meaning in her membership, focusing on her work as a founding member and the focus she felt her chapter placed on character.

Nicole also focused on the positives of Chi Delta when discussing her membership in a lower tier house. Although she knew that

we are always put in the bottom tier ...I will say that our reputation isn’t number one, probably, which I know and which is frustrating at times, but then again I love the girls in my house and I get along with them well, so if our reputation as a whole here isn’t that great I am okay with it because I don’t feel like I necessarily comply to our reputation of...like we get called lazy and stuff like that sometimes.

This didn't matter in how she viewed Chi Delta, and the extent to which she was proud to add Chi Delta membership as a component of her identity. When discussing the positives of her chapter, Nicole said

Chi Delta as a whole, one of the most important things to me besides friendship is our philanthropy. My mom had breast cancer, my grandma died from it and I had a couple other family members have it as well, so it touches me very personally. It was very close, if not the number one, reason why I did join Zeta, behind the conversations that I had with the girls.

The importance of Chi Delta's commitment to breast cancer research made Nicole proud to be a member, as did the personal connection she had with her sisters, despite the negative reputation her house held overall.

Women who belong to top tier sororities with negative reputations are also aware of the views others hold, and talk about how these ideas are either inaccurate, or irrelevant. For example, Devon, a member of top tier house Pi Omega Pi, says

I think we're a top house. We always have one of the highest...like whenever we have rush we always have the first or second highest for new incoming members. I mean, I think that people like us, so I think we're a top house.

While she correctly identifies her chapter as a top house, she is also aware of the negative stereotypes often attributed to members of her chapter, which she discusses in describing what makes someone a good sorority sister.

Well, since we don't have the best reputation on campus, I think someone that would be a good Pi Omega Pi is to kind of do things that people don't think that we are. Like, partying...we have a lot of girls that don't party, that don't drink

and stuff, and I think not making a bad name for us, I think that would be a good Pi Omega Pi.

Yeah, I think it is that we are party girls and, I don't know, I guess maybe don't really care about school. We're just here to find a husband or, you know, something like that. I mean, it is completely false. We have a ton of girls that are very smart and we have engineer [sic] majors and stuff like that, so I think that it is obviously just a stereotype.

As a member of a highly ranked, top tier chapter, Devon recognizes both the positive and negative ideas about Pi Omega Pi. However, much like members of bottom tier chapters, she feels that these stereotypical aspects of the informal ranking system are inaccurate and do a disservice to the actual members of her chapter.

For women in both bottom tier houses and top tier houses with negative aspects of their reputations, focusing on other characteristics of their sororities and the perceived inaccuracies of the criteria used for informal rankings is essential in determining their identities as members of their organizations. Women in houses with undesirable images use various tactics in managing their identities as sorority members, most frequently bracketing their organizational identities in terms of not doing, rather than in terms of doing (Mullaney 2006). This allows women to shape their own narratives of their sorority identities, manipulating both reputation and experiences into an identity that reflects what they feel are important distinctions between their sorority and other chapters. While Adrienne, Victoria, and Nicole are aware that their houses rank poorly in the minds of the Greek community as a whole, their focus on what distinguishes their sororities from others creates a sense of pride and dignity in membership. For A Mus Adrienne and

Victoria, the fact that their house does NOT focus on appearance when recruiting or retaining members serves as a source of satisfaction when comparing their chapters to others on campus. Nicole uses her own focus on Zeta's philanthropic work to distinguish her sorority from others on campus. In her mind, the fact that Chi Delta does not participate in highly visible campus activities speaks highly of what she views as a more important commitment to philanthropic pursuits. Crafting an a positive collective identity out of not doing what other chapters do is only one way women negotiate negative organizational stereotypes. Devon eagerly talks about how, in her mind, Pi Omega Pi does not do what others perceive them to do, namely, judging on looks and partying excessively. She remarks on the negative stereotypes of Pi Omega Pis, saying "I don't think most people would think that an attractive girl would be smart. You know, they maybe think they are kind of an airhead or something like that... I don't feel the same way. I mean, you always have those few bad apples that give your organization a bad name, but for the most part it is not true at all." By drawing a distinction between what others perceive her sorority to focus on, and what she believes is the reality, Devon reshapes a negative collective identity in to a positive one.

Conclusion

While appearance is certainly a salient characteristic in shaping sorority identity, both for individual members and for sororities as a whole, it is far from the only aspect of sorority identity. Women's experiences with negotiating appearance as sorority members serve to illustrate the importance of appearance as a source of distinction. First, sorority

women report that women in the Greek community can be distinguished from non-Greek women on campus, which supports previous research. The degrees of nuance and interplay regarding appearance and sorority belonging suggests that this connection is strong and extant, yet far more complicated than is often perceived. Sorority women use appearance as a means for constructing belonging as members of their chapters and the Greek system as a whole, instead of blindly conforming to strict standards of appearance. While sorority women do report a higher focus on maintaining attractive presentation of self, this focus takes several forms. The main use of appearance as an aspect of organizational identity is the function certain standards of appearance serve as a differentiating factor between sorority chapters. As the consensus regarding informal sorority rankings indicate, appearance is both a standard and widely accepted criterion for determining organizational reputation. Beyond this, identity distinctions are also shaped by the extent to which a sorority does not adhere to standards of appearance. While members of top tier sororities use their chapter's ideal appearance as a source of pride, members of bottom tier sororities often use their chapters' perceived rejection of strict guidelines of appearance as a source of esteem. Women's interaction with strict ideals of appearance in the sorority community is far more nuanced than past research has indicated. In addition to serving as a point of distinction, whether positive or negative, the extent to which pressures and social control regarding appearance are expressed tacitly or overtly varies greatly between sorority chapters.

CHAPTER 6: THE IMPORTANCE OF MONEY

Several narratives emerge when sorority women discuss financial status, consumption, and the importance of money in sorority membership. First, women either deny the importance of money and possessions for their sorority, or acknowledge it. Second, among women who DO acknowledge the importance of money, social status plays two important roles: it serves as a gatekeeper for entering the Greek system, and also functions as a crucial component of membership and belonging. The consumption rituals of women in the Greek system are predicated on financial status- in order to fit in, one must have the money for shopping for correct brands and socializing at the right places. For sorority women, class is most frequently visible through consumption. Financial status is a key element of sorority life, as well as a crucial determinant of belonging in the sorority community and a given sorority in particular, as the idealized sorority appearance requires significant financial resources to maintain. Much like adherence to appearance guidelines, ability to consume serves as a means for sorority women to construct and display belonging as members of their organizations.

Consumption as a Gatekeeper in Greek Life

From the onset of the decision to join a sorority, money is important, as many sorority members acknowledge. First of all, rush costs \$160- to even begin the process of joining a sorority, women must pay to go through rush, at the same time that fees for tuition, room and board, and other university expenses. In addition to rush expenses, dues

and house costs range from \$1,835 – \$3,190 for new members in their first year. For members who plan to live in the sorority house during their sophomore year, costs range from \$5,659 – \$9,560, with an average of \$7,278. For sorority women who live outside of the sorority house, costs average \$1,762, and range between \$1,240 and \$2,610. These rates are comparable with the average costs of room and board for those who live in University residence halls, which average \$8,944 (University of Missouri Panhellenic Association website).

However, the costs of membership for particular sororities, including dues, and room and board in the sorority house are not disclosed to potential new members up front. As Becca says: “I asked when I went through, but this isn’t just Phi Kappa, almost every chapter, I got turned down as far as that question goes.” When asked to explain why she thought the Panhellenic Association didn’t provide this information, she went on to say:

I think because they don’t want to hurt some chapter’s chances of getting potential members based off their price because in the long run that hurts these girls that are going through recruitment because even when I was a potential member and I was going through like pledge ships, like money was sort of discussed but not really. You were still pretty much in the dark about how much you were about to get yourself into by signing this contract.

For sorority women who did have set budgets for costs for housing and dues, this created a situation where women had to leave the sorority as soon as they had joined it. In regards to those who could not afford to be members of highly expensive and high status sorority Phi Kappa, Becca offered the following simple explanation of what happened when costs

were finally disclosed “some girls did [leave]. Some girls in my pledge class had to quit – just like that.” Her remarks indicate the unspoken link between social class and the Greek system: just like with couture clothing and jewelry, if you have to ask; you can’t afford it. Lisa, a member of DTPhi, said that “Our house is in the lowest tier of like fees, dues, house dues and stuff. And like rent to live in the house.” However, when asked if sororities were allowed to disclose information about costs to Potential New Members (PNMs) going through rush, her responses were ambivalent.

I think that they...I think that’s something you can tell them. I don’t really know. I’ve never said that, but that is something that they’ll tell you eventually. I mean, it’s still pretty expensive, but, yeah, some of the houses I didn’t feel comfortable with the questions like “what does your dad do?” “What does your mom do?” like “did you go to a private school?”

Once again, her comments highlight the subtle and unspoken class cues that the Greek system uses to determine whether or not a PNM will fit in. The questions with which Lisa felt uncomfortable, such as those about private education and parents’ occupation, were most often reported as being asked at Phi Kappa, which former member Becca described as the most expensive chapter on the Mizzou campus.

Even sororities that charged lower fees and living costs still are highly expensive, and exert a powerful influence on women’s experiences, as members’ answers indicate. Maria, in response to being asked about what being in her sorority means to her, first responded “It means I spend a TON of money now this semester.” Chloe, who had deactivated from Omega Xi six months before she was interviewed, discussed the

financial factors by saying “Jesus, it costs so much money to be in a sorority... Yeah, I think money is a huge factor. You can’t even consider being in a sorority if you don’t have money.” Chloe went on to share how finances played a huge role in her decision to leave Omega Xi. “I mean that was a huge factor for me, quitting, sort of, I mean...I mean let me say now I paid for everything. I paid for my rent, I paid for utilities, I paid for my groceries, I completely was like self-sufficient. . I think a lot of sorority girls are also getting their rent paid for.” Chloe drew a contrast between herself, who paid for her living expenses as well as her sorority expenses, and most other women in the Greek system, whose parents provided the financial means necessary for sorority involvement. Her experiences echo Becca’s, who began her discussion of why she left Phi Kappa by saying “I am no longer a member first off because financial obligations are just...after I moved out of the chapter, it became really expensive. Our house dues are one of the most expensive on campus and I was busting my butt to do well on the outside.”

The two former sorority members interviewed both listed shortage of funds as a reason for leaving their sororities. Although official Panhellenic Association literature says that “All of our sororities have academic resources, support, and scholarships for members”, current members found that in reality, sororities provided little financial support. Cara described how Omega Xi addressed the issue of members having trouble affording dues and other sorority expenses:

I don’t think they are really sympathetic to a lot of people who do have to pay their way through school which isn’t even really my main concern yet since I am just like saving now but they don’t even care really and they aren’t even very

good about working out like payment plans and stuff. Like you can make an appointment with the treasurer and like the financial advisor and stuff but I think it is like a lot of hoops to jump through to get something like that and they are not good about scholarships either. No one will pay your dues for you really.

When asked about scholarship opportunities, Cara described how her sorority didn't provide assistance for members who could not afford the sorority itself, but instead offered the touted scholarships to academically successful members.

I am not positive but I know that like Omega Xi has really, really limited scholarship opportunities and it is like you are more likely to get someone to pay for your school because you are in Omega Xi than you are to get your actual membership, like if you are an outstanding Omega Xi leader, they will be like "Oh, here is a \$5,000 scholarship to put towards books and stuff and classes but they won't get your dues for you.

Cara also discussed the fines levied by sorority chapters for members who skipped any event or meeting for a non-school reason:

My parents still pay for it as of now and they get really mad when they see that like fine of \$100. They are like "Why did you get fined"? Because I didn't go to an ice cream social like that is so dumb and they don't even recognize a lot of legitimate excuses, like they have to be school related. A lot of times if you are working, that is not an excuse.

Her parents' frustration with paying fines based on Cara missing social events due to working in order to earn money to pay for school illustrates the intrinsic assumption that finances are not a worry for sorority members or their families. Becca also found this assumption frustrating, as she struggled to attend events to avoid being fined by Phi Kappa, even though this often required her to work fewer hours and earn less money to

pay for tuition and living expenses. She found that her difficulty in reconciling work, finances, and sorority events set her apart from most of her sisters, who did not worry or even think of money as it pertaining to their sorority experience. For example, Becca said:

That was one thing that definitely separated me from other girls in the sorority. We would get fines and I had to go to everything even if I was like busy to the max because I could not afford the fines that other girls would laugh about that their parents would pay for... I can't think of the numbers for that but I remember for work week, one year they made it \$50 an hour you were late. So some girls didn't show up for days and we were there for at least six hours or so, I mean.

The following conversation with Courtney, who felt that money was definitely a highly important part of the Greek system, illustrates the extent to which financial status is relevant in day to day life of a sorority member.

KATHLEEN: Okay. How does that [lack of funds] work for them?

Courtney: Uh, it makes me sick because, I will be honest, we have an account and when girls don't like come to things, they get fined.

KATHLEEN: Okay.

COURTNEY: Whether it be \$20 or \$30, they put it all into a pot at the house, like an account. So we have \$15,000 worth of fine money sitting that the chapter doesn't know what to do with.

Courtney: We have three girls whose parents just got laid off who can't pay their dues until the last semester before they graduate. Omega Chi won't give them any of the money.

KATHLEEN: They won't give them like a scholarship or anything?

COURTNEY No, nothing and it makes me sick. It does, so, because it is like, "Oh, you can't afford it? Sorry – too bad so sad".

KATHLEEN: So they get deactivated or whatever?

COURTNEY: Yep, they don't get to graduate as Omega Chi which means they won't be Omega Chi alum which means if they have a sister or a daughter that comes through, they won't be considered a Omega Chi leg[acy], which I think, is awful. It is awful.

COURTNEY: But I think that is a perfect example where it is almost like everyone has always said, "Oh, you are buying your friends or you're buying your sisterhood": and to a point, they are absolutely right which is awful, awful but. I'll be honest in junior year, we lost about 20 girls because that is when the economy turned for the worst and a lot of girls just said, I am cutting this out. I can't do it; my parents can't do it".

Her comments also show how little sororities offer in the way of financial assistance, support and consideration, regardless of claims to the contrary. While Courtney did not experience these problems personally, her friend Becca, a former member of Phi Kappa, did. Becca summarized her experiences with seeking financial help from her sorority thusly: "I went to my sorority, talked to them about my financial issues I was having and they don't deal with that and so it was either pay the full amount or get kicked out and so I ended up deactivating because I didn't want them to forcefully kick me out so I had to deactivate." The difficulties that Becca, Cara, and Chloe, and Maria had with affording their sorority expenses, and the lack of solutions their sororities offered, illustrates the interplay between belonging and sorority identity. The lack of scholarship opportunities and the unspoken assumption that members' families are able to afford sorority expenses without struggle suggests that financial ability is a key factor in a woman's ability to fully be a part of her sorority and sorority life.

While not all sorority members acknowledged the importance of financial status,

the majority of those who did, did so obliquely. However, for those who did deny outright the influence finances and social class exerted in the Greek system, they frequently cited the presence of members (though few) who paid their own dues and living expenses as proof of the irrelevance of finances. For example, Nicole felt that in this regard, her sorority was in fact unique. When asked if money was an imperative for being a member of Chi Delta, Nicole answered “ No, I don’t, because the majority of the girls in our house pay for it themselves...So I don’t feel like they come from over-proud families who give them whatever they want and easily pay for it.” Victoria felt that her sorority was changing in this regard, and that newer members valued social class more highly than original charter members. She styled her sorority, the newer; lower tier AMu, as

... not really a super materialistic group of girls. Some of them are and I think that some of the newer members are, but in my experience, not really because a lot of the girls in my pledge class paid their own dues. Although there are some people whose parents pay their dues, others pay their own, like work their butts off to try to make money. But I think with the newer group of girls, it’s a whole new thing that’s coming up.

Lizzie, a member of elite sorority, Beta Sigma Beta, when asked about the importance of financial status and social class, responded that these factors “[don’t] directly matter, I mean, obviously you have to pay your dues and everything like that but I wouldn’t say having money is like a requirement.” She went on to highlight the inclusion of members who did in fact pay their own way as proof of the egalitarian nature of her sorority.

Just I know there are girls who are really wealthy in our chapter and I know girls

who are paying their way through college in our chapter and working and just there are all different variations. I wouldn't pinpoint it to say like everyone in the chapter is really well off whereas like I know like in some fraternities and stuff like right now, we are with this fraternity on campus called Delta and Deltas are known for having money and it's just like kind of a joke. It's like Delta is really not going to do anything; they are just going to write us a check.

By contrasting her sorority with a very wealthy fraternity on campus, Lizzie was able to simultaneously issue a brief acknowledgement of money as being a factor, while at the same time offering an overall denial of class and finances as components of the sorority experience. Many women interviewed made similar claims, offering the presence of members who did pay their way through school as proof that money was not as essential of an identifier as is often claimed. However, the women usually described those who did not receive parental support in individual terms, suggesting that their existence was rare enough to be noted by other members. Those who claimed the sorority system was not exclusionary based on financial status based their assertions on the presence of very few members who did pay their own way. By consistently referring to the few members of their chapters who were supporting themselves as a foundation for the belief that anyone could in fact join a sorority, many women crafted a tokenistic narrative, ignoring the fact that self-supporting women were rare enough to be easily identified, while using their presence as 'proof' that anyone can join and fit in.

This attitude was not universal among sorority members, nor was the perception of class status as a requisite for membership seen as a negative. Kimberly, for example, felt that the limiting of membership to those of a certain class made the sorority experience

more comfortable and smooth, for both women and their families.

Obviously if you're in a sorority, then that means that your family usually has enough money to put you in a sorority, so I feel like automatically everyone gets narrowed down some more to a similar upbringing. Not necessarily, but I feel like a lot of the time it does that. Like if you go to a private school then you're automatically a little bit narrowed down, because your parents like believe certain things.

While this connection between sorority membership, class status, and identity provided comfort for Kimberly, as it ensured she associated with those whom her parents termed "the right type of people", her experience is not universal. Becca's experience as a financial outsider in her elite sorority highlighted the extent to which 'the right kind of people' are defined as such based on class, and the attendant ability to consume that accompanies class privilege. As a student from a lower middle class family who was paying her own way through college, Becca's membership in Phi Kappa, the sorority known most for the importance of money was noteworthy, and her experiences exemplify the important class holds in sorority life.

Phi Kappa's reputation for focus on financial status was well known- not only did former member Becca say the following about her sorority:

I feel like it is, I guess, stereotypically, Phi Kap is different in that they are considered like daddies' girls it is kind of like not money maybe more so than some other sororities, it is kind of expected and thrown around a little bit in other sororities I can think of like Betas and Omega Chis but Betas do it in a more modest manner.

Members of many other sororities also shared this perception of Phi Kappa, and had experiences rushing there that supported their opinions. Many interviewees mentioned that during rush, members of Phi Kappa asked about their fathers' occupations:

Um, Phi Kappa... money, money so, you know, labeled, I've heard. I didn't go through here... You know. There you go. I've heard they ask the girls what their parents do for a living and I am like, oh, God; whatever. – Courtney, Omega Chi

Like Phi Kap, they like asked me what my dad did whenever I was going through recruitment and I think I was the third person to go. I mean obviously there is a girl in my sorority like that, too, but it seems like for the majority, they all like really nice jewelry and like, you know, just some things that they wear, you can tell it is expensive–
Samantha, DTPhi

I would say that it [money] helps a lot. I know like Phi Kap that actually asks you what your dad does. – Kimberly, DTPhi

One house asked what my dad did. And, I mean, he's not a doctor... - Lisa, DTPhi

As the comments from women in a wide variety of sororities indicate, consumption and financial status serve to facilitate both belonging within a sorority as well as distinctions between sororities. The frequent references to Phi Kappa as the “rich girl house”, and discussions of both Omega Chi and Beta as wealthy sororities serve as frames of comparison for women. As former Phi Kap Becca said, “it [money] is kind of expected and thrown around a little bit in other sororities I can think of like Betas and

Omega Chis but Kappa's do it in a more modest manner." While Samantha acknowledged that her sorority, DTPhi, is "pretty normal", she "definitely started buying more expensive clothes" once she joined, though she still didn't buy "super expensive like sorority girl clothes" like women in other chapters. Courtney talks about consumption setting her house, Omega Chi apart from other sororities, though in this case, spending money to achieve a desirable appearance took the form of plastic surgery rather than clothes or other items:

In my house on average, we would have three girls get breast implants during school year. We had several rhinoplasties done. It is very funny, after I got here, I someone convinced three girls to be breast reductions done who had been in the same boat as me as far as health goes, but plastic surgery is, you know, a girl comes back from Christmas break and guess what she got for Christmas...Dad bought her a new chest... Phi Kap, and that would probably be the only other one that would do that but with my house, we were like #1 on campus for plastic surgery/procedures being done.

Women also made distinctions between sororities based on the style choices and consumption related appearance standards of other sororities when describing acceptable standards of sorority style, as discussed further in Chapter Four.

Consumption Standards in for Sorority Members

Once in a sorority, membership costs often pale in comparison to costs that mount up as members are expected to wear certain brands or go to certain bars and shops in order to feel that they belong. For sorority members, the relationship between consumption and belonging takes a highly interactional shape. Chloe describes the

importance of consumption of the right brands thusly:

It would be an advantage for sure, you know, just to be able to like have nice perfume, to have nice makeup, to see people do their makeup, wear nice perfume, like having a pair of Sperry's probably, you know, would be an advantage just because it helps you fit in.

Her mention of Sperry shoes was frequently repeated by others, who often used this expensive brand as an example of desirable sorority style. Sorority style, discussed at length in Chapter Four, is largely dependent on the ability to afford the upscale brands deemed stylish and appropriate for sorority women.

Becca, a former member of Phi Kap, spoke at length about the ways in which finances and consumption were crucial for continued membership and belonging in her sorority. As a lower middle class student who needed to deactivate from Phi Kappa, Becca said that financial pressure attached to dues and living expenses was the main reason she left her sorority, and that inability to keep up with classed symbols of belonging was the second reason.

When speaking about the importance of money once a member of Phi Kap, Becca described her experiences in detail:

It mattered about really group inclusion, like if you wanted to do the same things as the other girls, you had to have money to do it like just take for example, I'm still friends with a few of the girls that were in my pledge class – they go out and have dinner almost every night. They have like dinner dates with each other and I'm like I can't afford that. I mean that's one thing like I would love to still be in connection with some of those girls but I can't afford to eat dinner out every night. Like going shopping once or twice a week, you know, eating dinner out,

going and having cocktails at like Room 38 or something – like that would be fun to you but I can't do that and I feel like I missed out on bonding experiences with the girls because that was something that they bonded over things that had to take money to do.

Becca went on to share how Phi Kap identity was tightly intertwined with class issues, as conveyed through fashion and style choices.

Yeah and the whole clothes thing is a little intense, too. I didn't know half the brand names that I know now until I joined that sorority. Tory Burch, David Yurman – that's a huge one. Those were the two big ones I never heard of until I joined a sorority but those are the heavy hitters because everyone that could afford them had them in not just one, but had them in multiple, you know, amounts and then the girls that could barely afford them had to get at least one of them so they could say they had it and then people like me that were like "Dude, I can't afford it".

When asked about her own feelings when she couldn't keep up with the shopping habits of her sisters, and wear the same kinds of brands, Becca felt that her sisters didn't ever criticize her, but instead simply couldn't comprehend financial limitations on wardrobe choices.

I think more for myself – I mean I dress hip, I guess you know like with the times but I think it was more like a personal thing that I would feel not less worthy and not like I base my worth off what I can afford but at the same time when you are surrounded by 80 women that just have no idea about the real cost of things in life and you are struggling to put just regular clothes, like regular semi-cool clothes on your body, that got a little frustrating. I think it was more of just like a personal like bummer that I couldn't. No one like blatantly said anything like that but it was like kind of like understood – I think they were just oblivious – they just assumed that everyone had that kind of stuff. Just like the way they would say "Why don't you go buy a pair of True Religion jeans? They are really cute. You can get them at this store". Their concept of money was just a little bit off. But

they didn't force it on you or like call you out for not wearing it but they expected that you would wear it.

While Becca uses specific brands to illustrate the high cost of consuming products in order to belong, the trendy brands of the moment are less important than the sense of belonging created by consumption. In *Longing and Belonging*, Stephanie Pugh describes the fluidity of specific branded objects, explaining that the ability to purchase the current hot ticket item is what confers belonging (2009). For example, many sorority women mentioned shopping at Forever 21, a trendy and inexpensive store. However, when referencing clothing or accessories purchased there, women frequently talked about mass shopping sprees, or made laughingly self-deprecating references to the cheap merchandise. According to Pugh, this does not disprove the importance of the ability to consume, rather, it refines it. The concept of "scrip tokens", items which can be tangible or intangible, serves to create so-called "economies of dignity" enabling individuals to participate in and belong to certain social circles (2009). In the case of sorority women, as illustrated by Becca's experiences, these tokens can be expensive jeans, a cocktail at an elegant bar, or even the ability to skip an hour of work on a sorority project without worrying about paying a \$50 fine. These economies of dignity, predicated on financial status, serve to subtly enforce social class and to privilege sorority members from backgrounds with abundant resources.

In addition to the significance attached to consumption of expensive products and socialization activities during the regular course of life in Phi Kappa, Becca described

how special sorority events also centered on status symbols and the ability to easily spend large amounts of money.

Mom's weekend, that was interesting. Mom's weekend was about shopping the entire time; it was about the winery and shopping. We would have moms to come in on a Friday and go to a comedy club or some kind of group mom thing with the daughters where it would be – one time we went to like a fondue chocolate party with the moms and had wine and cocktails and then you wake up in the morning and there are vendors that come in and the vendors that come in are like purse vendors and jean vendors like True Religion... And so that's like - but they are at discounted prices but discounted prices for those kind of jeans they are still \$120 versus \$300 but for women that can afford that, you know, it was like awesome but then like the jean vendor was like the big thing on Saturday morning on mom's weekend; that's what would happen every year and that is what you would do. You would go with your mom and you'd try on jeans in the back room and then you would buy these name brand jeans that were on sale. So that was like the big thing and then you would go to the winery afterwards. Then you would go out to a piano bar at night.

The consumption rituals surrounding Mom's Weekend at Phi Kappa exemplify the importance of both consumption and femininity and appearance for sorority members. First, the expectation that mothers of sorority women be able to easily pay for expensive brand name items for themselves and their daughters, as well as trips to wineries and upscale restaurants emphasizes the overall importance of financial ability for consumption and belonging. Second, the focus on classed rituals of femininity also serve as illustrations of the values held by the sorority system as a whole. For many women, sorority membership is a legacy from their mothers, who also tend to adhere more strictly to highly feminine ideals of appearance and classed ideals of consumption (Kendall 2002). As Lisa, a member of DTPhi, described her initial participation in sorority life:

My mother enrolled me in rush and “well you are going to go through it, and you’re going to at least have the option, and then if you decide you don’t like it we’ll deal with that issue when it arises.” It wasn’t really an option. It wasn’t that I wanted to do it. I kind of was...I had told my mom, up until I did rush, I didn’t want to be there and this was stupid, and this was her thing and not mine. And my mom was like the perfect little cheerleader type person in high school...like valedictorian and homecoming queen, captain of the cheerleading squad, president of her sorority, and all that.

Courtney’s simple declaration that “you can tell someone is a sorority mom” shows the extent to which sorority women learn and share attitudes that emphasize appearance and consumption from their mothers. Sorority women frequently reported their mothers’ emphasis on appearance, such as when Kimberly said that her mother

works out every single day and she says she won’t work out at the gym because she’d have to put makeup on to go to the gym and she doesn’t like working out in makeup and things like that. And I feel like with me being raised like that and seeing that, not that it’s a bad thing, because obviously I think she’s living the life right now. . Like my mom was like “well, if you just do what I do” and stay with my boyfriend, she’s like “and then you’ll just marry a doctor.” And my dad will stay stuff like “I can’t wait to see you 20 years from now, never having worked a day in your life.” And like things like that.

The specific ideals of appearance that Lisa, Courtney, Kimberly, and their mothers hold are highly related to social class and consumption. For example, the frequently referenced “classy” appearance for which many sorority women strive is highly connected to both femininity and social class (Basow et al 2007, Bettie 2003, Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006). Subtle makeup, attractive and alluring yet non-revealing clothing, and elegant and refined hairstyles are not only indicators of femininity, but also of social class. These looks favored by sorority members are predicated on the ability to pay for makeup, clothing,

and beauty treatments. Not only do sorority women often learn these values from their mothers, these consumption rituals continue during sorority members' years in their chapters, through rituals such as Mom's Weekends, which frequently center around both consumption and femininity, via shopping and trips to spas and salons.

Becca's involvement in Phi Kappa and her resultant sense of not belonging and leaving the sorority was shaped primarily by the importance of disposable income for complete inclusion in her organization. Women in other sororities also felt that being able to display the symbols and indicators of class was requisite for admission and inclusion. However, their ability to pay for these items discussed in regards to sorority style is rarely mentioned as prohibitive. Becca was the only woman interviewed who listed her family's annual income as between \$25,000 and \$50,000, and her social class as lower middle class. Nearly half of interviewees listed their family's income as over \$100,000 a year, and no one else described their social class as anything below middle class. In fact, over half of women interviewed labeled their family as upper middle class or higher. Her set of experiences as a sorority member were unique among those interviewed, however, one other woman did note the extent to which the Greek system selected for higher social class standing. Upper class Courtney from Omega Chi commented remarked "I've kind of found that a lot of the and again not all, most of the kids in the Greek system tend to be the kids that will, you know, not have a problem going to the mall and drop \$50 on a new dress or not have a problem to write a check to go get your nails done; you know, whereas I don't think everybody on campus would do that."

In addition to expensive brands that serve as status symbols, money enables women to display their belonging and identity via sorority letter merchandise. Symbols of sorority identity, such as t shirts, bags, and necklaces, are important tools that members use to display their belonging and acceptance in an elite organization. However, these symbols aren't free, and their cost is another marker of implied financial status, as well as another method of constructing and indicating belonging.

As Becca said, "Yeah, I think totally and the other thing like you don't have to buy all the tee shirts and you don't have to buy all the party favors and stuff like that but if you don't and you go to a party and you are the only one not wearing the party tee shirt, you are not going to fit like a part of the group. You have to buy – there are some things they say you don't have to buy but you do have to buy them if you want to be included." Samantha felt the same way about attending sorority events along with their attendant costs: "and you pay to go to a fling and just little things add up". Courtney mentioned the high number of sorority t-shirts women end up with, saying "Okay, it sounds really silly to say but tee shirts here are very big like for events and stuff like that so even if they don't have their letters on, if they have a certain tee shirt on from the event, you know they are Greek, like homecoming blood drives." What she didn't mention is that each shirt costs between \$15-\$20, and over the course of a year, sorority events require ten or fifteen shirts. Often times, members are not allowed to attend sorority events, parties, or date socials unless they purchase the t-shirt the sorority has had created for the occasion. Courtney's upper class background allowed her to describe the

necessity of purchasing a themed t-shirt as a “silly” facet of sorority life, whereas women such as Becca and Samantha found these types of items illustrative of the impact financial status had on their ability to participate in the consumption required for full belonging.

Conclusion

The extent to which a sorority member is able to fully belong is predicated on her ability to participate in the consumption of goods and activities popular in the sorority community. In the sorority community, participating in the consumption of certain brands and activities is more than an indicator of the class background of women involved; it is a crucial determinant of the extent to which a woman is able to fully belong to her sorority and the Greek community as a whole. By consuming desired brands and social experiences, sorority women make use of financial ability to forge a sense of belonging and identity as sorority members. From the beginning of the rush process, when a potential new member is required to pay \$160 to participate in rush, to the joining of a chapter without being told the actual costs to membership, to the necessary t-shirts and fines for missing activities, sorority life is full of formal, required costs. Women such as Maria, Samantha, and Cara illustrate the importance of disposable income when discussing the costs of these items and activities. More importantly, the true necessity of consumption for belonging comes during day to day life. In order to adhere to sorority standards of appearance, women must be able to purchase certain brands of clothing, accessories, and afford to engage in beauty work such as tanning and getting their nails

done. This consumption not only signals belonging via appearance, but also illustrates the importance of a suitably feminine appearance for sorority women (Bettie 2003, Kendall 2002). For sorority women, and their families, upper class standards of feminine beauty are considered essential. This importance is clearly visible in Becca's discussion of how Mom's Weekend for the wealthy sorority Phi Kappa focused exclusively on consuming high end clothing and accessories that women used to present a desired feminine appearance.

While many women did speak candidly about the salience of consumption and class for fitting in to sorority life, it was far more common for women to provide evidence of financial egalitarianism in their chapters by discussing the presence of token members who supported themselves. By consistently referring to these women as proof of the irrelevance of class and status, women were able to create a narrative of equal opportunity while dismissing the struggles that others had in belonging. This is evident when women talk about how the costs of belonging are seldom mentioned in sorority life. Courtney, though upper class, was well aware of the role that consumption played in fitting in at Omega Chi, saying "It sounds like the norm...[and if someone can't do that] you're just like, "Oh, God, why or "Why don't you want to go get your nails done", you know." Lizzie described Beta members as not discussing money, by specifically mentioning that women who have more money tended to be circumspect: "I don't feel like everybody gravitates toward one person because they have money; I feel like it's like kind of on the DL [down low] if nobody...some people flaunt it more but it's not like

everyone's on the same..." Although she acknowledged that all members were not on the same financial level, she focused exclusively on the women at the top, drawing distinctions between the 'regular' Beta women, and the wealthy Beta women, completely ignoring the possibility of less wealthy members. This denial of the importance of material wealth for belonging appears in other upper middle class college students as well (Stuber 2006). By drawing comparisons between themselves and those deemed "rich", sorority women are able to overlook and deny the salience of consumption and financial status in their own chapters. The presence of Phi Kappa, universally considered the "rich girl house" allowed sorority women to effectively ignore the necessity for consumption in belonging to their own chapters. By talking about the relatively expensive brands popular in sororities such as DTPhi, Kappa, and Omega Chi in comparison with the very expensive brands popular among Phi Kap members, women illustrated the frequently unspoken necessity of consumption while simultaneously denying the overall importance of financial status in Greek life.

CHAPTER 7: RUSH, APPEARANCE, AND IDENTITY

Rush, or formal recruitment, is an intense, week long process where potential members vie for spots in their desired sororities, and sororities compete to get the best new members. The Panhellenic Association at the University of Missouri describes the rush process as follows:

During Recruitment week, you will visit all the PHA sororities on campus and get to know women in each chapter. Each round of Recruitment consists of planned social events. For example, Sisterhood Day allows the sorority women to show their sense of humor with a skit, while Philanthropy Day focuses on each chapter's philanthropy and community service work. These socials will help you figure out the goals, values, and personality of each chapter on campus, and help you decide which chapter is best for you. Keep in mind that Recruitment is a mutual selection process, so while you are deciding which chapters you feel most comfortable with, the women in each chapter are also trying to figure out which women would fit best into their sorority.

Each round of recruitment also includes numerous cuts, as chapters decide which Potential New Members (PNMs) to invite back, at the same time PNMs or rushees decide which chapters they would most like to join.

During the first two days of Recruitment, you will visit all PHA chapters so you can get a glimpse of sorority life in general. After you have met women from all 15 chapters, the mutual selection process begins! Just as you are making important decisions about where you fit, the chapter women are making important decisions too about the future members of their sorority. On Wednesday, you might visit up to 11 chapters and watch skits that will give you insight into each of the chapters. Thursday you might visit up to seven chapters to learn about each sorority's philanthropy and what it means to each chapter. Friday you will visit a maximum of three chapters for Preference day. This day is sentimental and will be your final visit with chapters before you decide which one is the right match for you. Saturday is Bid Day and is when chapters offer invitations to join their sisterhood.

Sorority rush, despite being described as a fun introduction to Greek life, is in fact a highly choreographed exercise in impression management and belonging. As Potential New Members, women strive to present a managed appearance that signals their ability to fit in to a sorority's image. Meanwhile, women currently in sororities engage in meticulously planned branding of their sororities, designed to highlight the image the organization as a whole wishes to present. For both rushees and current members, rush serves as a stage to showcase belonging, or the potential to belong, using appearance as a means to do so.

Rush Appearance as a Potential New Member

While sorority rush is presented in official literature as a fun, exciting time of meeting new friends and potential sisters, the reality for most rushees is that recruitment is a high-stakes exercise in presentation of self, where looks and appearance play a key role. Women use their appearance to convey ability to adhere to the appearance standards held by the Greek system as a whole, as well as the differing standards held by individual chapters. Even prior to joining a sorority, women who intend to participate in rush report higher levels of focus on and preoccupation with physical appearance than did women who did not participate in rush (Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). From the beginning of rush week, area salons and stylists see huge increases in the number of clients scheduling appointments for hair, nails, and tanning, indicating that the highly feminized ideal presentation of self in the sorority system (Basow et al 2007, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009). Some potential new members (and their

families) also hire “Rush Consultants”, whose paid services are advertised as increasing a rushee’s chances of joining a chapter with high status. For women who wish to join elite or especially selective chapters, particularly at Southern schools, these services are considered a necessity (Robbins, 2004).

For some potential new members/PNMs/rushees, rush is the first time that the importance of appearance, style, and consumption in the sorority system is made visible. For others, rush confirms their previous knowledge. Since rushees tend to be self-selecting as women who place more emphasis on physical appearance, those who participate in rush and join sororities are not only rated as more attractive than their non-Greek college classmates, they also report valuing appearance more so than other college women (Anderson 2001, Atlas & Morier 1994, Basow et al 2007, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010). Regardless of whether or not this is new knowledge, women must consider the connection between appearance and belonging in the sorority system. Anna, a member of Omega Chi, described the differences she felt existed between Greek and non-Greek women, saying

I guess like for me, as far as like beauty and appearance, I think a lot when you just look at Greek and non-Greek, I think a lot of people are the same but then again for some reason, there is just this, I guess girls in sororities think they have to, you know, be dolled up more than others, and I don’t know if it is just, you know, judgments that are from other people because they are expected to look a certain way; I don’t really know but for me personally, I don’t really see it as a big deal. But, you know, there are certain people that really see it as being important – beauty and appearance and, you know, the designer wear and the makeup and the hair and there are others that, you know, don’t really care that much.

Another woman commented on this very thing, observing the differences between rushees and the rest of the population. According to Alex, a member of Alpha:

I remember going through recruitment and everyone was about my size. It was interesting... Almost like everyone rushing, kind of thing. By the end of it. It was kind of strange. I am not used to seeing like that much uniformity with it, with the rise in obesity rates in America. Like I just think about it now and am just like, that was strange. I don't know if sorority life kind of tends to pick out the people who are very like weight conscious and that kind of thing.

However, even women who did choose to rush, thus indicating a presumed focus on appearance were compelled to think about looks and self-presentation in a new and different way, in a very high pressure situation. Although they did not comment on the overall appearance standards of sorority life and rushing, women consistently described sorority recruitment as a high-pressure, taxing exercise in physical presentation of self.

Cara found the rush experience

...really stressful in ways that I had never really, I don't know, like talking to girls in my rush group that were like in the dorms with me going through rush and they would just be like critiquing what they were going to wear the next day and like how long they were going to spend getting ready, what time you needed to get up, you know, if they should take a shower the night before the morning of just because it might be crowded or something and I was just like I wasn't even really planning that much. It kind of made me think about stuff that I don't think I would have thought about otherwise like I guess my physical appearance.

Jen explicitly pointed out the different attitude towards appearance that going through recruitment compelled her to take, saying

Rush was a 180 from what I am used to, because I was always the girl in my friend group... Like when we were out my girlfriends would have to pick out my outfits for me and dress me up or I would be wearing sweats. My best friends picked out my entire outfit for recruitment before I even left from home because they knew I wouldn't be able to do it on my own.

Her friends needed to select her outfits (and she let them), knowing that her unstudied style would not be acceptable during recruitment. Despite the massive effort rushees put in to their style and appearance during recruitment, equally important was the appearance of a flawless front stage performance. Women described the desire and labor they devoted to looking attractive, stylish, and conforming to sorority style, but at the same time, they often described the necessity of this work and struggle being hidden. As Chloe says:

It was definitely premeditated. Uh, I felt like I wanted to look effortlessly cool. I wanted to show off my sense of style, you know, but I also knew that it was going to be hot and rainy all day so there were times when I would like go back and hurry up and touch up my makeup and like so I was conscious of that like I did realize that was probably important.

Stephanie observed the premeditation other rushees put in to their appearance, as an attempt to conform to each individual chapter's ideal image, and found it particularly intimidating.

Yeah, I was really intimidated. Especially on the last day, pref day, when you have to wear like a formal dress, and I still left my hair how it had been. I didn't do anything to it because I knew if I straightened it would be huge, and I didn't feel the need to, I guess. And standing outside of all the houses with girls who had their hair perfectly straight or curled and so much makeup on and they were carrying heels, like they had changes of heels, like depending on what house they

were going to. And standing in line with all these girls putting on a different pair of shoes, and they were like “oh, I don’t know. The girl I’ve been talking to seems like maybe she would like this pair of shoes better.” It was like, how would you know that? I don’t know. So it really intimidated me. I didn’t feel like I could get into any house, standing out there with some of the girls.

The style guidelines provided by Panhel do little to assuage PNM’s concerns about their appearance during recruitment. The first two days of rush require rushees to wear a provided t-shirt, subsequent days include more choice in attire, requiring the rushee to choose her own “sundress” “business casual” outfit, or “semi-formal” dress. Maria, a member of DTPhi, and a rare sophomore rushee, commented “Yeah, we are given t-shirts and they are like, “Oh, like, show us your personality through your t-shirts.” And I’m like, how do you freaking dress up a t-shirt?” Rushees are presumably expected to be familiar with acceptable strictures of appearance, even at this early stage of sorority life. Other rushees also expressed frustration, but some had other resources to look to for help. For example, Kate, whose sister was a member of Omega Chi, and was able to help her choose outfits prior to rush, her initial fear was easily overcome:

I mean, I was nervous because they tell you sort of what to wear, but they don’t really tell you specifically what is a good thing to wear, and I was trying to figure that out... Yeah, my sister did help me. I think I ran my outfits by her first, so she did help me out... Yeah, which was good, because I feel like a lot of girls don’t have any idea and don’t have someone that has already been through it and I feel sorry for them, because I know they are really stressed out about it, for the most part.

For Kate, her sister’s belonging to Omega Chi was an important asset in her efforts to craft an acceptable appearance as a PNM.

Overall, the rush experience creates a stage where women are required to present an acceptable appearance not just for sorority rush, but also for the particular chapter which they wish to join. While all sororities value a highly feminine appearance, and those who lack contemporary elements of beauty such as long hair, slim figures, and stylish clothes, the extent and methods to which these standards are conveyed is a key part of individual sorority identity. When discussing the distinct standards of appearance held by sorority chapters, women frequently highlighted the extent to which appearance played a crucial role in illustrating belonging, or the potential for belonging, at rush. As a whole, the sorority system does not allow women who do not meet feminine beauty ideals in to Greek life. Beyond that, style and appearance allow Potential New Members to communicate their willingness and ability to fit in to a particular chapter by following both formal and informal restrictions. Since informal sorority rankings are largely based on appearance, and the ranking of a sorority influences the extent to which a member shapes her identity based on her organizational affiliation, the salience of appearance at rush forms the foundation for the later connection sorority women forge between their appearance and their sorority membership. An experience Samantha had as a rush counselor exemplifies the extent to which women are aware of, and concerned about, the connection between appearance, status, and belonging:

I had the worst girl like this sounds bad but, I am sorry ...Like during pref night, we're just walking around like if anyone wants to talk to us, we're here, like it might not be anyone, 'like hey can I talk to you' and they'd go like 'we are so stuck between Gamma Sig and Pi Omega Pi.' She was like 'I don't know who to pick, like they are both great'. I am like you know, they are both pretty similar, like what are you looking for in a sorority? And she just kept comparing looks

and she was like ‘I just feel like I’m going to like I feel less pretty at Pi Omega Pi because they are just all so pretty’ and I was like – It took all that I could do to have just a conversation with her because I’m like ‘You’re seriously concerned about like you are going to end up joining a chapter and going to hate it cause that is not what makes you happy in a sorority if they girls are prettier or not.’

Pi Omega Pi and Gamma Sigma Beta are widely considered to have the best looking members on campus, and are in fact fairly similar in perception, as well as both formal and informal rankings. The rushee’s concern about feeling “less pretty” in one chapter, compared with another chapter that is also known for very attractive members, illustrates the connection between current (or future) sorority affiliation, appearance, and identity, and the extent to which members are aware of the interplay between these factors.

Influences on Appearance at Rush

In some cases, women described their appearance at rush as nothing out of the ordinary. Devon, a double legacy at top tier house Pi Omega Pi, claimed that she didn’t put any more effort than usual in to her appearance, saying “I may be put on eyeliner, you know, but I didn’t outdo myself.” This is in contrast with her perception of other rushees, who “did try to look better than they are”, which she described as putting on far more makeup than they usually would, creating what, in her mind, was a false impression. However, Devon’s perceptions may have been influenced by her membership on Mizzou’s varsity cheerleading squad, where she cheered for televised football and basketball games. She accepted the appearance requirements for cheerleading as a given, saying

Whenever we are cheering or have an appearance or something we have to wear makeup, we have to wear lipstick, but I think that is more of whenever people are in the stands at a football game and they are looking at you, you tend to get washed out if you don't wear like... You don't have to wear obviously a lot of makeup, but you have to have something like eyeliner or something and then the lips, so that they can see if you're smiling or not.

It is entirely possible that Devon's position as both a legacy and a cheerleader places her firmly in the category of women whose attention to beauty and appearance leads them to the sorority system, and influences her view of her use of makeup during rush as "not outdoing [herself]". Given that Devon generally wore far more makeup than any other woman interviewed, this is a fair conclusion. Her casual dismissal of the reasons behind beauty standards for cheerleading, where she claims that cheerleaders are regularly weighed for "health purposes":

We get weighed, but that's for health purposes, like we don't wanna...like if you're losing a bunch of weight at a rapid pace then they have a concern, you know? So they don't say, "Oh, you've gained weight," you know? They don't ever say anything like that... I think it's a good thing. I mean, we've had problems in the past where girls had eating disorders, so I think it is definitely a good thing. They do it privately, so it isn't like everybody knows what your weight is.

As a member of a sorority known for very conventionally attractive members, Devon experienced 'normal' appearance and interpretation of motivations behind mandatory weight and appearance standards in both cheerleading and sorority life in a manner very different than others. Brynn, a member of DTPhi, an upper tier sorority known for fun and sporty members, and also member of the University dance squad Golden Girls, provides a contradiction to Devon's statements about both the lack importance of

appearance in Pi Omega Pi, as well as the lack of importance of appearance for members of Mizzou spirit squads. Brynn described how her two roommates, both members of Pi Omega Pi talked about what they looked for during rush: “But their house is very, like that’s [appearance] like the first thing. And we’ve talked about it before. It’s not like a secret. That Pi Omega Pi looks for the cutest, prettiest blonde, whatever.” Brynn also offered a drastically different and more in-depth take on the focus spirit squads place on conventional standards of appearance.

We have to practice in a sports bra, which I am so thankful that’s over, like I’m done with that. But she doesn’t weigh us or anything, but we’ve had like...if you gain weight...because the costumes aren’t made to fit you. Like our white costumes that we have are at least ten years old. Like they’re made to fit the girls ten years ago and obviously nobody is that small anymore, they’re just not. So you have to fit into the costume, and if you don’t then you sit out. And girls have had to sit out before, which is really sad.

In addition to the coach of Golden Girls requiring members to ask for approval prior to cutting their hair or telling them what types and amounts of makeup to use, the coaches also chose members based primarily in appearance.

...[b]ecause you have to try out also in a half top. Like there was one girl last weekend who was a phenomenal dancer, phenomenal. But she had, she was extremely, extremely pale, had like a boy cut hair, like very, very short, you know what I’m talking about? Didn’t really...like it looked like she tried to put makeup on, but I don’t know...and she didn’t make it for that reason. Which was kind of sad, because she looked nice. But Shannon will say, I remember last year...she didn’t tell me this, because I’m helping her, I’m assistant coaching this upcoming year, that’s the only reason I know all this stuff. She picked a girl just based on her looks, could not dance at all.

Brynn's experiences as a member of an upper-tier house that isn't specifically known for 'hot' members tie in to her rush experience as well. Rush events were scheduled immediately after a mandatory camp for band and Golden Girls members, so Brynn described that as working against her, appearance-wise, despite being extremely conventionally attractive. "I mean I got cut from a bunch of houses just because I didn't look right, because, I mean, camp is outside, obviously. I would have my hair in a ponytail, be sweating and disgusting, and trying to go through. It was a stressful process." Although a member of a spirit squad for which good looks and careful adherence to beauty standards are mandatory, Brynn was able to detach herself and discern the connection between beauty and identity in both sorority life and life as a Mizzou spirit leader. One possible explanation between her perceptions and Devon's is the differing expectation of beauty for members of Pi Omega Pi, Devon's sorority, whereas DTPhi members are thought of as cute and nice, good looking, but not extremely hot. Even though Devon's chapter was described by every other woman interviewed as "the hot house", and caring about looks during rush, Devon herself said that during rush, Pi Omega Pi focused on "hav[ing] a good conversation and they're not so attractive we still would rank them higher." Because membership identity for groups of which Devon is a part is so tightly entwined with looks, her interpretation of "good conversation" being at the forefront of requirements for new members may be true, after an automatic mental dismissal of less attractive rushees, regardless of conversational skills. Additionally, her experiences may simply illustrate the hesitancy most women displayed when asked

straight out about what defines beauty, as discussed in Chapter One. While their narratives did demonstrate a strong awareness and sameness in evaluating beauty and femininity as important, and salient characteristics for their, and others' identity, the women interviewed unfailingly repeated common phrases about beauty being "on the inside" and presentation of self being done "to feel good", dismissing concerns about appearance requirements.

Appearance and Presentation of Self as a Sorority Member

As a member of a sorority, appearance takes on an even greater role during recruitment, as sorority women choose their styles of dress, appearance, and presentation to communicate carefully crafted and maintained images, all aimed at promoting their sorority's image and brand. As members of a sorority, women's individual presentation of self must adhere to the chapter's strict standards of desired appearance. In order to create the ideal image of a sorority's brand, women must frequently conform to an extremely homogenous standard. Becca's blunt assessment of the presentation of self that sorority members hoped to accomplish during rush emphasizes the necessity of appearance for creating an ideal organizational identity.

We were selling a brand. We were selling Phi Kappa and when you are trying to impress these girls, as much as these girls are nervous, we are trying to impress them to be a part of us and so you want to put your best foot forward and Phi Kap I feel like is definitely a sorority that cares about their appearance but not as intensely as it is during, well some of the girls but not quite as intense as it is during recruitment and you do that because you want these girls to think that you are perfect and that if they join you, they will be perfect and they will be pretty and they will have long hair and they will walk in unison.

All sororities get involved in intense preparation- as Courtney said “I will tell you a lot of girls and I would never say this but a lot of girls went tanning beforehand. I mean, everyone gets their nails done before recruitment. These places in Columbia are packed for the week leading up to it.” Women talk about the specific image their dress and appearance at rush was intended to convey. As organizations use dress as a symbol to convey the beliefs, practices, and values of the organization itself and its members, clothing is important for both individual presentation of self, as well and sorority branding (Pratt & Rafaeli 1997). For example, Alex, a member of Alpha, a sorority known for intelligent, classy, sophisticated and mature members, described her sorority’s rush outfits thusly:

We all have to have the same, like, heels basically. It is, like, always get, like, patent leather heels. It is just, like, that classic thing that you are going to need in the real world anyway. It is something that I like, because everything that we choose is something that you will wear outside of recruitment. It is not, like, ridiculous. And I had never owned a pencil skirt before recruitment. And I also learned how to walk in heels and probably can pull it off for more than three hours now, which is kind of nice. They have trained me well... Because it is, like, this is who we are. It is not about, like, the clothes. We all wear black, but it is like simple dresses. It is not like giant prom dresses or anything like that. It is nice. I like that. I like that it is about the person, it is not about the stuff.

Although she claims that “it is not about the clothes”, but rather “this is who we are”, the members of Alpha use their clothing choices to convey who they are, to the extent that it is difficult to separate the organization and its members from the identity they wish to display. Maria’s comments about how she felt uncomfortable with the formality and forced perfection of Alpha when she went through rush indicated that Alpha was

successful in showing “who they are” via their self-presentation at rush. She compares her house, where if “someone forgot to do like their little like squat thing, like they’d look at each other and they would just like start laughing”, as opposed to Alpha, where “They like walk out and like flip their hair.” She goes on to discuss how her sorority, DTPhi, known for fun and sporty members used their attire to convey information about their organization. “Delta Tau Phi came out walking in TOMS, which in and of itself gives away shoes... I didn’t know that. But, I mean, like, I followed TOMS and I was just like, wow it is like really cool because, like, I don’t know if they did that purposefully and they probably did.” Becca discussed how her former sorority, Phi Kappa, communicated their upper class, appearance-focused image and identity during rush.

There was one day that we all wore black dresses; I mean we got to choose our own black dresses which is rare because the rest of the week, we dressed exactly the same and the black dresses had to be approved the week before. We had to dress entirely in the outfit including either diamond earrings or pearl earrings and a pearl necklace. We had to dress head to toe and then the older girls would approve of our attire or not; if it was not approved, then you either had to borrow a dress from somewhere else or go buy one.

Cara, a member of Omega Xi, an upper tier sorority known for attractive members with somewhat eclectic style, described how her sorority handled conveying their organizational image via fashion. “Every house tries to do something a little different or like each year... But at Chi-O, like our parameters are a little broader. It is like get a white skirt. Or here are several different styles of shorts because we are aware that there

are a bunch of different body types and not every style looks good on every person. So our kinds of guidelines were a little easier to deal with but we still wore some pretty weird stuff.”

Sorority women also used dress to communicate values of their chapter and the Greek system as a whole, including an emphasis on looks and classic styles. Over and over, women mentioned expensive preppy clothing store J. Crew as the go-to store for more casual rush outfits. This suggests that women in the sorority community use clothing and appearance not only to differentiate between their chapter and other chapters, but also between women in the Greek community and GDI (‘god damn independent’) not in the Greek system. Identity work often takes the form of bracketing oneself and one’s organization against others, defining themselves by drawing boundaries between themselves and others they choose not to associate with (Wilkins 2008). By wearing similar styles from the same store, women were able to convey both the desired identity as a member of their particular chapter, but of the sorority community as a whole. For example:

This year we looked like we came out of a J. Crew catalog and that’s not really my style, but that’s the girls that were in charge of rush that’s their style... We had white shorts that were kind of a little bit longer, but not to the knee, but mid-thigh. Then we had T-shirts that had three triangles on it, tucked that in with a little thin belt, like a brown belt, and then we had to have matching brown shoes.-
Devon, Pi Omega Pi

We all had to wear J. Crew shorts and sandals. But then if we had any piercings we had to take those out. Any tattoos had to be covered up. Basically, anything

that would give the impression of being different at all had to be...that was really frustrating to me because I have both.- Sarah, Omega Chi

They were looking more for like kind of a J. Crew style type of shorts and so that was what made them the right shorts. There was no white like cloth shorts.- Becca, Phi Kap

They picked out the shorts and sandals for us, and I don't think we voted on it...The shorts were J. Crew and the sandals were Old Navy.- Kate, Omega Chi

In addition to the expense of shorts from J. Crew, which no one mentioned as a concern, illustrating the presumption of available money, the selection of shorts from this brand also brings size concerns in to play. For larger women, J. Crew shorts are not a feasible option, as they are offered in a limited size range, and tend to run small. When asked if there were women in her chapter who could not fit in the selected shorts, Omega Chi

Sarah replied:

I would say a few of the girls did, but those girls were in membership. Which, like, they would be in the basement and they would do all the numbers and calculating. So like we give scores to girls when we talk to them and they go down and calculate like "okay, well we liked these girls. We gave them a 5."

When questioned as to whether or not these women were assigned to membership because of their weight, Sarah said "no, they chose to do that. You had to go through a large application process, but it kind of just turned out that...I don't know why that was. It was definitely not like "we want you to be on membership" or anything." However, it

is possible, and likely, based on other interviewees' comments that these women chose to volunteer for membership positions in basement in order to avoid the awkwardness of not conforming to the sorority image via their size. For women whose appearance did not meet the Omega Chi standard, their decision to be on the membership committee offers an illustration of how the interplay between appearance and belonging occurs for current members during rush. Stephanie, a member of Rho Delta who is recovering from an eating disorder, shared how her preoccupation with size and weight gave her the opportunity to see how her sorority dealt with non-conformity when it came to size and weight.

Well, we all wear the same shorts or whatever. So they have to order the shorts. So in advance they have to try them on. So the most frustrating thing was like I...people kept asking me if I tried on the shorts and I was like "no, because I'm not coming back [for rush]. And I was sitting in the TV room one day and all of a sudden they come in with their shorts. I had left to go up to my room to get something, got sidetracked and came back down and all of a sudden all these girls are in there trying on the shorts. I was like "oh my God" it's just panic inducing for me. Because I compare myself to everyone.

When the J. Crew shorts arrived, Stephanie knew that there were women in her house who could not fit in the sizes available, so when she saw that

Someone left a computer open downstairs and I have like a sick, weird thing I had to know what the sizes were. So someone was like a 16 and it said a different web site, so they must have had to get it from somewhere else.

While these other members did get similar outfits, there was absolutely no discussion of this publically, nor was there any acknowledgement or suggestion of buying rushes

clothes from a store with a wider variety of sizes. This experience was universal across sororities, with women mentioning that those who could not fit in the chosen clothes did get other outfits, but privately, and without protest or discussion, or they ‘chose’ to participate in other roles during rush. The lack of overt acknowledgement or discussion of a nonconformist appearance underscores the unspoken importance of appearance in sorority life, indicating that these standards were so deeply internalized that members didn’t even need to discuss them publicly.

Choreographing Sorority Image During Rush

The image and identity of the entire sorority is communicated not only through attire, but also through the way rush activities are organized. Sororities choose what to wear, how to act, and who will be the “face” of the sorority that PNMs see first very carefully. At each house, members walk out of the house to greet PNMs, who, as Becca put it “... think that you are perfect and that if they join you, they will be perfect and they will be pretty and they will have long hair and they will walk in unison.” This choreographed ritual of organizational identity showed off Phi Kap’s desire image, but also indicated that those who joined the house would be able to attain that image and identity by belonging to Phi Kappa. Sororities communicated their highly gendered organizational identity by carefully selecting the members who would lead the walk out to greet rushees. Several members of Omega Chi painted a detailed picture of Omega Chi’s commitment to a classy, feminine image during their choreography of rush. Sophomore member Kate commented:

That is actually interesting. I think they don't really like say it, but they...well, I don't know. They like set it up, because it is two girls that walk out from each side of the house and then they meet in the middle and walk down and out to the girls. But, I'm pretty sure they match up girls that are like the same height so that it looks neat and I think they also try to, if they can, do the same hair color.

Sarah, another sophomore, had similar observations.

They had everyone...we would have two people come out two doors, and then they would match up and walk out and separate. And they would have people who looked alike, that complement each other. So like the first few girls that we had walk out, like one of them is a model, she dropped out to model. And like the other is known as just like our hottest senior. And they all walk out...we have some really pretty girls, and so I was like...it was very expected.

The most interesting information about how organizational image plays out at rush came from Courtney, a fifth year Omega Chi senior who had been rush chair previously, and responsible for organizing the entire rush process. She confirmed that Kate and Sarah's impressions were correct, and that it was indeed a calculated process.

From my experience, I don't want to say I didn't think I would turn into the psycho recruitment person but I literally treated it like a business so I will be honest, we had girls in our house who would have facial piercings, not a lot, but you know some or visible tattoos or like my side, it was cool during the summer to do like streaks of color in their hair; this is very rare. I made everyone dye their hair who had done that. I made everybody remove piercings, cover tattoos. I don't know if you've ever been here for recruitment but everyone wears like the matching tee shirts. I made everyone do pearls and this sounds so silly but I looked at it like appearance is everything. When we had to walk out of the house, Allison Smith was going out first...absolutely.

Allison Smith, a Miss America contestant, sister of a famous actor, and the wife of a high profile professional athlete, was a key component to Omega Chi's rush process during

Courtney's time at Omega Chi. Her membership in the house was a big draw for the chapter, which Courtney did not see as a solid reason to join the chapter, but still, found it helpful to show off high profile members to enhance the image and brand of the sorority during rush.

Still, you know, just everyone...we will have a line where people will get their hair teased by girls; like it sounds so silly but for a lot of these girls going through that have no idea, it is just what they have seen in the movies, you know, so they think that every sorority girl is going to be well put together, so great. I didn't have that intention when I was going into the position but, inevitably, that's what ended up happening.

You judge on appearances. And I know that sounds so silly to say but it is the reality of life. I mean, when you go to a job interview, you are always going to dress for success and that's how I treated it because if we, you know, had a potential new member that saw a girl with her nose was running, it was like "Oh, God, they are all funky". We might lose her and she could be a legacy which means that her grandmother was a Omega Chi, her mom was a Omega Chi. Because that's where a sorority tends to get the most money from, the most involvement from, so you want to keep it in the family. So it petrified me because we had it happen the year before where the dress code was kind of lax and we lost a legacy because the girl she talked to had multiple piercings and a tat and that sounds ridiculous to say but...so you put Allison Smith out front.

Courtney was the one who originally instituted the rules that mandated that Omega Chis cover and remove her tattoos and piercings, and though Sarah found these rules frustrating, but at the same time acknowledged that "we like to portray ourselves as being very classy and we kind of give that impression", which she found as a source of pride.

Once rushees entered the house and began one-on-one conversations with sorority members, the impression management performed by sorority members continued. At top-tier house Beta Sigma Beta, the choreography of speaking to rushees was elaborate and

meticulously planned. Lizzie described her involvement with recruitment as a member of

Beta:

You can kind of tell if there is power rotations like big shots within the chapter like really pretty and really involved and really smart and like just kind of like stand-out members and they have those rotations like specifically talk to specific girls that they think are really really good and that we really want and so, I guess they use the best bait to catch the biggest fish or something. But because within recruitment, they will pull rotations so that certain people talk to certain girls and whatever but within each rotation, it works out everyone is given like its rotation A and in rotation A, there are five members so you're an A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4 and A-5 and then there is like just you go through the alphabet, you're Q - Q-1, Q-2, Q-3, Q-4 and Q-5 and stuff and what is it – like my freshman year like I feel like it's just my personality to be more laid back and stuff. And if you're like first meeting me, I'll be the first one to say like I can be very socially awkward , just like I'm very shy to begin with and then really like I really need to be comfortable and able to like come out of my shell, so I guess my freshman year, I feel like I was really like reserved and shy and I didn't really feel like I had my place in the chapter yet and so I mean I was a Q-5 like that was my rotation number my freshman year and like the 5's, I guess, if you don't need as many girls, they are like the first ones to not go out or something like that so I guess, technically, like I know a lot of girls who are like "I'm a 5; like that's considered like bad, I don't know; like I didn't really care. It was like "Oh, good, I don't have to talk to people" and stuff like that but I know there was another girl who was a 5 and she was like almost in tears about it and stuff like that but I think it was just like people taking it too personally because this girl, in my opinion, she didn't have anything to like make her less worthy to talk to new members or anything like that. I think it's kind of randomized and people almost take it too literally and stuff like that. And like there were rumors like supposedly if you're like - this one girl who is just so dumb and she is just like "Yes, if you are an A, you are the prettiest and then it just like goes down and B is not very pretty. But if you look at the rotations and stuff, I wouldn't necessarily think it's that way. I feel like it's just like mixed and so when I was a sophomore, my first time doing recruitment, I was a Q-5 and then last year, as a junior when I held a position and stuff, I was a K-1 and stuff so because I was a 1, I guess like was one of the first ones to walk out and stuff but I feel like as a K-1 because I was an officer, all the officers were like, we were the most involved; we were kind of the leaders of the chapter and so that's why we were 1's and stuff.

Not only did Lizzie acknowledge that more “stand out” members of her sorority were matched with highly desired Potential New Members during rush parties, other women explained that this matching often happen based on looks. As Becca put it:

We had a list of the girls that we had to bid for and impress and so our most impressive girls, a/k/a the prettiest girls and the girls with the most qualifications within the sorority would be matched up with that girl for the day to speak to. So we knew sorority Phi Kap Miss X would hang out with potential member that was the best one of that group and so in order to recognize these girls, we made posters and put faces on them.

“Phi Kap Miss X”, the phrase Becca used for high profile members of her elite sorority, known for wealthy and attractive women, speaks to the detailed presentation sororities engage in as organizations. By choosing to put high profile members- very attractive women, campus leaders, even celebrities- in prominent positions, sororities display their social location and collective identity on terms that allow them to physically and socially look their best. Sarah echoed the statements made by Lizzie and Becca about how her top tier sorority, Omega Chi, chose women to put “out front” or in highly visible positions to talk to rushees.

I...they have...what I had gotten the impression of freshman year was that girls with bad grades get...have to pass out water, which is known as the really bad thing, like you don't want to pass out water, because those are the girls who don't get to talk to anybody. Then my best friend, myself and one of my other good friends all had 4.0s and had to sit on the stairs and pass out water. Well, a lot of the girls who were on academic probation got to walk out. So that was, I usually...I sat on the stairs, and one day I was just put in the basement the entire day.

In her mind, this was because “one of the girls who was running it...like I knew when she got in charge, it was not going to go well for me”, but also because the girls who were allowed to walk out despite being on academic probation, were very pretty and showed off the desired Omega Chi image.

Many other members alluded to (but never acknowledged directly) less attractive members of the chapter were assigned to administrative duties, or stationed in the back of the house where they would not encounter rushees. Stephanie, a member of Rho Delta, was the only one who explicitly addressed this as being an issue in her house, describing an incident prior to rush that highlighted how sororities position and treat current members differently based on their appearance.

Even our chapter advisor, there was something that happened and we changed. We used to wear pencil skirts and shirts on our philanthropy day. And then she was like “well, I think it would be really cute...” because our philanthropy is about heart health, “...we’re like heart healthy, so let’s wear Nike shorts and Rho Delta shirts.” And everyone was like “okay.” And then she was like—and this is our chapter advisor—she goes, “well what if we have certain girls wear booty shorts and then other girls wear yoga pants.

Stephanie correctly interpreted this distinction as based on weight and body shape, and took a highly proactive course of action following this incident. Her past experiences with eating disorders made her extremely aware of the focus and concern her sorority sisters placed on appearance and weight. Much like the incident in which she hid her sorority’s scale, Stephanie spoke out in protest of an idea that she felt marginalized some of her sisters.

I was crying not out of sadness, but rage. I had never been so angry about something in a long time. So I sent her this long email. And like everyone, luckily, on our exec board shot it down. No one was even like “oh, that’s a good idea.” But I sent her an email and I was like “as our advisor, no offense, you cannot alienate girls like that. It’s going to make...even if a girl is thin and you put her in yoga pants, she is going to feel terrible about herself. Even girls in booty shorts might not feel comfortable in that. It’s not something that you can like...and it’s going to be a very selective few who are in booty shorts. And if I were a girl going through rush and I saw girls in booty shorts, that would actually turn me off immensely.

In the end, her sorority did not go with that look, but still, size and appearance presented a concern during rush at Rho Delta, as her comments about the selected J. Crew shorts and the unmentioned issues several women had with fitting in to the sizes available. An acquaintance had described a similar incident she observed as a member of Rho Delta. The chapter had selected a certain dress from Victoria’s Secret for a particular round of rush, and one woman was unable to fit in to the sizes available. Without suggestion or comment from any other members, she simply paid for two dresses and then paid for a tailor to piece the material together to create the same dress in her size. The woman who related this incident to me reported that her sorority sister didn’t bother speaking to the rush chairs or sorority executives, as she did not want to draw any further attention to her size, which already placed her outside of the desired Rho Delta image, a status that she did not wish to exacerbate.

By working to present a meticulously planned, highly choreographed and ritualized appearance during recruitment, sororities are able to ‘brand’ their chapters and convey a desired impression to Potential New Members. Most sororities’ chose their

brand to reflect conventional standards of attractive, upper class femininity, focusing on classic styles, elegant and costly clothing and well-done makeup. In order to craft this desired impression, women who don't fit the ideal are often relegated to less visible positions during rush. Even after joining a chapter, the extent to which a woman fully belongs is still dependent on her appearance, as comments on the position of overweight, less attractive members, as well as members who do not meet the homogenous standard of sorority appearance indicate.

Appearance and Desired Image in Selection of Members

The selection process for deciding which PNMs are invited to return to or join the chapter varies from house to house- many houses flash pictures of rushees during the voting and selection process. Even without pictures being included in the voting process, members still acknowledged that appearance was a consideration. Alex felt that this was normal and natural, though not explicitly stressed during rush, saying

That is just a sorority thing. I honestly think that is just a sorority thing. I mean, and that is society as a whole. You are more likely, whether you are conscious of it or not, to want to be friends with someone who is, like, physically attractive. You are naturally drawn to that person. I think that I something that just happens. It is not something that is emphasized.

Women's descriptions of the process varied, with some claiming that no appearance related comments were made, others claiming that only positive remarks were allowed, and still others hesitantly acknowledging code words for discussing how a rushee's appearance did or did not align with the organization's image. Many members

acknowledged that campus-wide perception of chapters did rest largely on appearance, and that “on MUGreekGossip, again, they will always talk about some sort of the hottest pledge class of the year or someone in that pledge class is really ugly”. The salience of appearance in rush worked to maintain or improve chapters’ reputations and images. Because of this, most women ended up admitting that looks were important during rush, though they were hesitant to say so directly, and often claimed that their chapters discouraged the practice of judging on appearance, often stating that because negative or insulting looks-based comments were forbidden, that appearance wasn’t a consideration.

According to Cara, her high tier house doesn’t comment negatively on PNM’s appearances, either explicitly or implicitly:

I think that our pledge classes are put together for a different reason other than just purely physical appearances because I have never heard someone in rush stand up and be like, “Oh, she is really ugly; like let’s not take her... No, we are not supposed to say anything like judgmental. People will be like “Oh, she is cute” or like, “oh yeah, she is adorable”. But never anything mean.

However, Chloe, also a member of Omega Xi, mentions women referring to a PNM as “fat and she has horrible makeup”, and therefore “she is not going to fit in with us”.

Although appearance was the reason this PNM was not perceived as a good fit for the house, this was never stated outright, though according to Chloe, everyone was aware of the loaded connotations of the phrase. “If they were like large and kind of geeky, they just got cut, like it wasn’t even up for discussion... I feel like a lot of people were cut without us even realizing that they were cut.” Chloe also pointed out that in many cases;

girls who did not fit Omega Xi's standards of physical appearance were automatically cut by executives, who did not even put these rushees up for a vote. By discussing how the executive board of her house makes it clear that this sort of talk is not acceptable, Cara inadvertently draws a distinction between Omega Xi and other chapters, while at the same time not acknowledging that these same executives had done preliminary weeding out: "the exec members do a pretty good job of enforcing this. If someone goes off on a tangent, they will like interrupt people and be like "I don't know how that is really relevant to her character or like why she should or shouldn't be in this house. Like, if you can say something else about her that would be good but let's not talk about that".

In top tier sorority Omega Chi, Kate reported a similar rule about not making negative comments about PNMs' appearance, but also the coded ways women worked around it. When asked if appearance was an important for her chapter in deciding which PNMs to ask back, Kate responded "Yeah, I think so. I think it is something that doesn't necessarily get, well... Yeah, I think it is important, because we like go through slides of the girls coming through and a lot of times some girls would be like, "Oh, she's hot" or "She's pretty." But they never stressed, "Guys, we need pretty girls." That is not something that they would stress." Omega Chi had very formally mandates lists of approved comments, distributed by Nationals. In Kate's words:

When we go through the slides and when we are voting we have a list of like words and things that we can say that are approved by like Nationals or whatever. Yeah, and it is all very, "Oh she would be an asset to Omega Chi because she is intelligent, I don't know, achieved and sophisticated." And I think girls, for like sophisticated, that was their code word for attractive, I think. I mean, they never

told us that, but I kind of feel like that is what girls were implying when they used that word. Umm, and then you can say, “She would not be a friend of Omega Chi because she is not intelligent, not classy.” I don’t know, just the approved words. But then the side comments that I was talking about earlier, sometimes they would get mad if girls shouted something out, like, “Oh, she is so pretty,” they would be like, “Stop, you can’t say that out loud.” We had to stick to the list.

Sarah, also a Omega Chi, said that while Omega Chi did not flash pictures of PNMs during voting, pictures were available during work week (the week where members prepare for rush and encouraged to memorize names) so that appearance was definitely a consideration. “I did not hear any comments about...negatively about comments. But there were girls pushing for people based on being cute. But I never heard anything negative.” Anna, another Omega Chi, agreed that while her sorority did not permit members to say negative things about a PNMs appearance DURING voting, members would frequently discuss appearance after voting.

We will put up their picture, their name, where they are from, things they are involved in and their GPA, and I think a lot of girls get so tied up, you know, you will put up a photo and I have some really bad photos but I feel pretty, you know, and so it is like that one girl, maybe she had a bad photo but people will make comments about it, and I think a lot of the times it is, you know, what they look like and how they are viewed as but, personally, I know that is not the determining factor because, I mean, there are girls in there that people will be like, “Well, how did she get in, you know. She must be a legacy because she is not that pretty or something.

“Not fitting in” was a phrase used by Courtney when discussing a less attractive or overweight PNM visiting Omega Chi. Although this sort of thing “never has” been said, “everyone just knows that maybe it wouldn’t be the best fit for her”, even though

“no one has ever made any comments about [a member’s appearance], you know, jokes or anything.” While Courtney acknowledged that “the vast majority of the houses will look at appearance”, she tried to look for other characteristics in members as well. “Classy” and “sophisticated” were commonly used terms that many sororities used in voting on whom to ask back to another round; as well which women would receive bids to join. Nicole, a member of Chi Delta, put it most clearly when she described what ‘look’ her chapter sought during that year’s recruitment: “sorority classy” is probably the word that every sorority girl has ever used, but of course that is what you want to go for also because you don’t want a trashy girl.” Most sororities did not provide formal lists of terms to use, though the chosen terms were fairly consistent across chapters, and consistent with the overall image and identity that sorority wished to convey: attractive, feminine, and well-off.

Becca’s former sorority, the top tier Phi Kappa, DID provide universally understood code words for women to discuss the appearance of rushees: “

We had advisors like groomed women that were alumni that would come in and hang out with us and so that was – we couldn’t discuss that as a chapter together but was discussed informally with your peers like afterwards. And when it came down to voting, that was a time when we did do a slide show but we had to do a pro con/con pro situation, only four people could speak and we had to use our words but some girls would repeat it and not use the words and there would be slipups all the time. The word system didn’t work that great.

Some particular phrases that Phi Kap employed to veil their judgments about appearance were based on negative personality traits, as in other houses. One example Becca gave as

acceptable was “we can say things like she was strange or weird but that is like code for probably like we didn’t like the clothes they had on or we didn’t like how they looked. They weren’t pretty.” While statements about a rushee’s personality were understood to reference appearance and style, members of Phi Kap were not allowed to “talk like “Oh, that person has an ugly dress”, like that person was ugly or that person wasn’t pretty. You can’t say stuff like that.” However, the meanings of these remarks were clear to every current member of this wealthy and attractive sorority.

Rho Delta directly asked members to consider rushees’ appearance, although in a coded, yet very clear manner. According to Stephanie:

The rest of the house, they have our forms, and the girl will talk to four or five girls...three or four or five in the time she is there, but other than that, that is all the input we have is that form. On the form it has appearance on there too...It doesn’t say like actual...They try to like code it. But when they explain the form, they say that’s what it means. It says like “well put together” or “cute” or “smiley” or something stupid like that. And when I first saw the form, I was like “what is well put together?” I didn’t even know what that was supposed to be. It means that you’re attractive. But they use all these codes in case, God forbid, anyone find these forms, it looks innocent. Or maybe they just don’t want to look that bad at what they are actually looking for.

Bottom tier house Chi Delta, whose negative reputation persisted despite members being perceived as attractive also focused on appearance during rush. In this case, members of Chi Delta were explicitly asked to do so by their adult chapter advisor. As Nicole said:

We got a new advisor two years ago and because of that we’ve had a rough past two years, which has been the years I’ve been it. Our grades have gone down a lot and that’s because, we were told, because they chose our pledge class based on more appearance rather than the full package.

Although more relaxed about appearance guidelines overall, DTPhi did still encourage members to consider rushees' appearance during rush, albeit in an indirect way.

According to Jen,

There was like, we rate like a lot of the sororities do and there is a checklist on their academics, their involvement, their personality, the conversation you had and their presentation. So presentation...she said "and make sure they look good" and then she went, "No, no, no, not like look good, just make sure they are well put together." So she had to correct herself, but at the same time I feel like there is some sort of level of "If that girl is wearing your letters she is representing your sorority."

Libby made it very clear that in her sorority "well put together" and good presentation" meant attractive, just as "sophisticated" did in Omega Chi, and "smiley" and "well put together" in Rho Delta. As a result, when a new pledge class was assembled, members would be happy to say "when our new babies had come in everyone was like, "Oh my God, our new pledge class is so cute" and "We have such pretty new babies" and stuff like that, so obviously everyone was happy that they were cute and stuff like that." Her comments typify many sorority members' feelings on how an acceptable appearance is closely tied to the organization's identity as a whole, both for current members and for potential new members, as well as how appearance is used as a means of conveying belonging.

Not all houses showed photo slides of Potential New Members during voting.

Victoria, a member of bottom tier house A Mu, described why her chapter stopped using a picture slideshow during voting:

Just because we found that when we did use pictures, if there was a person whose picture wasn't the best but everyone had really nice things to say about her, we usually didn't take her because we didn't get enough votes for that person. And looks seem to even trump, like, GPA. Which is just ridiculous. So we stopped putting pictures up. Or times, like they just go and find pictures on Facebook and, I mean, I think it's funny sometimes when people put stupid pictures up or it's not them or something just ridiculous. So, if there is someone that is like...like pretends there is a picture of somebody on our slideshow and it was them like on a like rollercoaster and their face was like...they'd be like "no. We're not taking her". It's like it's obviously not what she looks like. They're like, "well, she didn't prepare herself for rush". I'm like, they shouldn't need to be prepared."

Her experiences with sorority sisters focusing on appearance made her uncomfortable, because she personally tried to stick to the principles she and other charter members held, where as she felt that "other members of my sorority in general, just look for people that are good looking and seem like they would make us look better, I guess." Adrienne, a founding member of AMu, recalled what happened when her chapter did use pictures during voting, and why this made her uncomfortable.

Yeah, like we go through a slideshow of every woman like that is rushing. Every woman goes through, and I think all the chapters probably do it, and look up the girl and find a picture of them and so that we look at every person with their name and their picture beforehand and you will sit in the room and they will say like, oh she is cute. Oh, she is cute. Oh, man. Oh no. You know what I mean. And then it is always awkward because like when you have been with a chapter for a long time, I am glad that I didn't go through it, because there are like girls in the chapter who say, oh, I remember everything people said about you.

Lizzie, a member of top tier house Beta, which did use pictures to during voting, also felt uncomfortable with the process.

We get to know the girls while looking at their pictures. I'm like, whatever. Obviously, if they have like everybody comments "Oh, that's a cute picture, like oh, and she's so pretty" and stuff like that and to get to know the girls and it's like I remember like the first year I did recruitment like I was just like being in the house like "Oh, this is awful that I'm like looking at this note card and looking at this picture of this girl and making like an immediate assumption about her and I've never even met her" and stuff like based on what her picture looks like and, I don't know, but because it's like a rating system that it's like you should know this girl because she was super involved, has a great GPA and stuff like – it doesn't matter, like an A-1 like involvement and GPA and stuff like that but I would say like just with other girls, it's like if one girl is prettier who is an A-1 and there's another girl that's not as pretty or whatever, people are going to notice the girl who is prettier and is an A-1 more.

Devon, a Pi Omega Pi, described rush voting in her sorority, explaining that only PNM's who had recommendation letters from family or friends who were Pi Omega Pi alumnae had pictures to display.

All we have are the pictures that we have people that have letters of recommendation and they send their pictures and we just have their pictures so we know who they are. We're not allowed to say bad things. We can only say good things, but if there is something bad we would say it privately with our president or something like that, so it's not like bashing or anything like that... We have a system that we have like a party and we talk to two or three girls and we just have to remember in our heads. We'll rank from 1 to 4, 1 being the best and 4 being the worst; which is kind of bad, but we rank them and so we just have to remember like, "Hey, I talked to the second girl and she was a 2," or something like that... A lot of it [rankings] is conversation. There are some girls where you're pulling teeth to try to get them to talk, and I understand that some people are shy, but I think you kind of have to not be whenever you're going through rush just because you can't see a person's character if they don't talk to you, so I think that is a lot of it.

This stands in direct contrast to comments everyone else made about the rush process at Pi Omega Pi, including DTPhi Brynn, whose roommates and fellow Golden Girls were Pi Omega Pis who shared information about rush with her. However, despite being known for specifically seeking pretty girls to join the chapter, Pi Omega Pi was far from the only sorority that acknowledged that looks played a large role for PNMs during recruitment.

Regardless of the discomfort some women expressed with the focus on appearance during rush, both as rushees and then later as members, most women did display tacit acceptance of the practice, regardless of paying lip service to nonjudgmental ideals. Kimberly, a DTPhi, who had transferred to Mizzou from a DTPhi chapter more focused on appearance, summed up the importance of appearance at rush by saying:

I think...I mean I do think that people think that you need to be really pretty. Obviously, like going through recruitment if you don't look presentable those five days, and if the girls aren't cute and pretty girls going through recruitment, you're like "oh, well, they may have a 4.0 and did all this volunteering hours, but so did this girl and she is really pretty." And so I feel like that happens. But I mean I don't think we will ever be able to get away from that, because I think girls are just so catty like that and I think that is what happens in every sorority. I think it says a lot about your upbringing. And it's like "oh, well if she has those clothes, I bet she went to a private school and I bet she has money in her family, which means she has also probably done all these different extracurricular and makes her like a more well-rounded person" and things like that.

Her comments not only illustrate the integral role that appearance plays in sororities, but, also, the overall role that class takes on in enabling women to create an appearance and identity that allows easy access to sorority life. Clothes and appearance as indicators of

both wealth AND worth (being a “well-rounded” person) are integral to the organizational image most sororities wish to project.

Adherence to accepted standards of appearance during rush serves as a sign of commitment to sorority identity and devotion to the sorority as well. According to Jen,

As far as appearances, as part of, at least for our sorority and I'm sure it is for others, it is not what the girl looks like but how the girl is put together is part of taken into account because it shows in a lot of people's eyes how dedicated they are to being in a sorority and being in this process, because if you can throw your hair up and put a cute dress on at least you know they want to do this. It just shows that they have an effort or a desire to be in the sorority, I guess.

By showing commitment to classed and gendered standards of beauty that fit the overall sorority image and ideals, potential new members' presentation of self accomplishes two things. First, they are able to express their current devotion to accepted norms of sorority appearance, confirming their eligibility for membership in the Greek system. Secondly, style and self-presentation that follows current archetypes also indicates their willingness to follow these ideals in the future, preserving the organization's chosen image, indicating that a woman is able to use her appearance to show belonging and uphold the sorority's reputation.

Conclusion

For sorority women, formal recruitment, or rush, is a critically important event for showcasing a desired image and organizational identity. From a woman's experience as a potential new member, where clothing and style are used as tools to convey willingness

and ability to adhere to accepted standards of appearance, to the display of branded identity put on by sororities as organizations, appearance and consumption are essential parts of rush. However, while these are indeed essential, they are not always explicitly acknowledged. Women repeatedly talk about the elaborate choreography their sororities perform in order to present an idealized image to rushees, but are more circumspect in discussing the extent to which appearance truly matters. For example, the enforced social control that places a premium on appearance leads sororities to put the most attractive and preeminent women in front, and also motivates members to strive for an idealized presentation of self via homogenous use of expensive clothing and stylish hair and makeup. This social control also serves to subtly communicate to some members that they don't truly belong, as they are unable to present the sorority's chosen image. This interplay between appearance and belonging at rush is so engrained that many members fail to recognize that it occurs. Social control regarding the importance of appearance runs so deeply that sorority members do not acknowledge it or discuss it explicitly. For example, the larger women in Omega Chi who chose to do paperwork in the basement, and the large women in Rho Delta who ordered a different brand of shorts without discussion or comment illustrate the acceptance most sorority women display regarding the salience of image for belonging, regardless of whether or not this serves to exclude them personally.

Women also display the importance of appearance for organizational identity, as well as the extent to which these standards are internalized during the process of voting

on Potential New Members. Nearly every woman interviewed was proud to point out that her sorority did not allow women to make negative comments about rushees' appearances, yet did not acknowledge that making positive comments and using code phrases accomplished the same purpose. Alex said that appearance "is not something that is emphasized" during rush at Alpha, but that seeking out attractive women was both "natural" and "just a sorority thing". The rush process highlights the extent to which appearance and impression management are crucial in sorority life, both for individuals and sorority organizations as a whole.

CHAPTER 8: REPRESENTING YOUR HOUSE: THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOTHES, MAKEUP, AND STYLE

Once in a sorority, the pressure to display and maintain an acceptable appearance continues and intensifies, because members are directly responsible for representing a house's image, which in turn influences standing. However, the necessity of conforming to sorority-acceptable looks is rarely or never stated directly. Instead, members are constantly exposed to subtle and not-so-subtle reminders of the importance of appropriate appearance for belonging. The strident and passionate declarations women made about acceptable sorority styles and appearance illustrate the essentiality of clothing, makeup, and style for belonging. Actions when wearing letters are require monitoring as well. Women frequently state that they attempt to avoid acting "slutty", rude, or doing anything that would cast a pall on the reputation of their sororities. Women often used negative incidents involving members of other sororities to indicate what they worked to avoid. By drawing these distinctions between houses, women manage their sororities' desired image using tactics involving appearance, consumption and belonging. Although sorority women's display of their sorority identity may seem casual and unstudied, it is in fact a well thought process designed to convey a certain identity, which relies on both tangible items and actions (Grazian, 2008)

Guidelines for Wearing Letters

Sorority members display their membership in and connection to their chapter through wearing t-shirts, jackets, skirts, headbands, necklaces, tote bags, and other accessories emblazoned with their sorority letters. Not only is wearing letters an effective way for members, especially new members, to proudly show off their affiliation, but it is also an essential means of representing the image of the sorority to the larger Mizzou community. As such, all sororities and most members have both formal and informal rules about where and how a woman is allowed to wear her letters. Most importantly, women state over and over how their clothing choices are influenced by their sorority affiliation and whether or not they choose to wear their letters often depends on whether or not they wish their present appearance or activities to be associated with their chapter. As women work together to form the desired organizational image via appearance and dress, the focus on wearing sorority letters only when looking good becomes crucial.

According to Kate:

I hate to admit that, but I do. Sometimes if I look really, really rough and gross I don't want to go out wearing Omega Chi and being like "Hey, I'm Omega Chi!" because I look like hell, so. I mean, I have gone out feeling like I look terrible and wearing Omega Chi and I don't really care that much, but sometimes I think about it and I'm like, "Wait, maybe I shouldn't wear this."

She also feels the need to present a classy, well-dressed image when out socially, tying in beauty ideals based on class and appropriate sexuality.

I feel like when you're going to a party you don't really, I don't know, I guess for me it would be more like older people, like adults, seeing me and I wouldn't want them to think that I was a skank or whatever, like my dress is too tight. So I feel like that is something that I would take into consideration. And for people to see me as a Omega Chi, yeah, like, I wouldn't want to be wearing anything revealing, like super-revealing or skanky, because I wouldn't want them to think, "Oh, she looks like a skank, so Omega Chis must be".

Becca shared a similar experience, showing concern about being a positive representation of Phi Kap even after leaving her sorority: "I notice I try to match more when I have my letters on like if I have a pink Phi Kappa I try to you know put on like a pink headband or something. I try to...yes, I guess so. That is true... You know even though I'm not in it anymore, I think I am still branding myself, I'm still a part of something and people don't know I am not in a sorority anymore but it's nice to, I guess, it's still nice to be recognized and you don't want to be recognized sloppily, I guess."

Sarah agreed, discussing how her "Omega Chi pride" comes out in her dress and accessories choices, even though she doesn't feel that this is something she plans consciously.

See, I go both ways, because I'd like to think that I don't have to define myself by a sorority and I'm a unique individual that I don't have to....yeah. But I do find myself, literally, every piece of clothing, I'll go out and I'll have my hoodie, my sweatshirt, my T-shirt, my shorts, my pants, my keychain, everything. It's kind of like subconscious and then I realize... And then when I don't have anything on, then I'm like "no one knows what house I'm in.

In addition to acknowledging that she doesn't choose to wear as much (or any) items with letters when she is not dressed well, Sarah brought up another example of using her actions to represent her sorority.

My other thing, and I wish I didn't...I'm a terrible driver, absolutely terrible. And my letters are on my car. And I have like almost hit people and I've been flipping people off before I realize it and I'm like "I have my letters on my car." So that's not good. I need to take those off. But, usually when I know I...I feel bad when I'm not representing very well and wearing the letters, I guess.

Stephanie used the example of an acquaintance from another sorority to highlight actions she felt were important to consider when representing her sorority:

I know Pi Omega Pi are kind of like the slutty ones. They're just like...at least that their stereotype. Even like my roommate has a friend in Pi Omega Pi and she came over and was talking about how she went to a frat and was like running around naked when she got really drunk and how she has slept with over 20 guys in college, but she is wearing a lot of Pi Omega Pi stuff, so you kind of can't help but associate her with that, especially when she comes in my room and is talking about it.

Lizzie's experiences included both her own personal preferences and formal suggestions and rules from her sorority's regional leaders:

I mean this is silly but like because I like to do sports and stuff a lot, I like sweat a lot and stuff and like I've got a shirt that has Beta like BSB that we always wore for recruitment and stuff and, personally, it is my personal thing like I'm not going to go to the gym and like sweat profusely and like be like going out in this shirt like that says Beta and stuff like that but there are other girls who do and stuff and I feel like going to the people who sport their letters and I personally am just like just I don't want to present our chapter as the sweaty pigs and stuff like that so, I don't know. But I guess, no, people don't drink in their letters. I guess, um, I don't know. It's not as much why – I don't present myself the way I do for Beta's sake but I feel when other people present themselves poorly and like talk

bad and like say rude things or make like a really superficial comment and they are wearing their letters - like that makes me mad because I'm like because you are making yourself look like an idiot and you are also wearing your letters that associates yourself with me, like that makes me look bad...

Beta members also received instructions from the sorority's national representatives about the importance of being a positive representation of Beta Sigma Beta via actions.

[W]e actually just had this big thing this past weekend called Province where all the Beta chapters from around like in our region so it was like the Beta here and at KU and at Iowa and Drake and stuff like all those chapters like their executive board so like 10 members from their chapters came here along with like older alums who are like in charge of like the bigwigs of Beta and stuff like that but there was like a seminar and I didn't go to that one but there were some girls who did and it was called *Wearing Your letters 24/7* and it was just about the importance of always like, I don't know, even when you are not wearing your letters, you are wearing your letters so it's always for your own benefit, presenting yourself in a good light and I think that was the gist of the seminar and just like knowing you're part of something bigger and just kind of to hold yourself to a higher standard because of that.

Courtney also mentioned that the unspoken standards of representation applied even at the campus gym, a common place to see members of the Greek community. Even though Omega Chi did not have official rules about appearance, Courtney spoke about the focus Greek women place on looking good even while working out "but you will see a Omega Chi at the gym every time you go, I mean, it is just kind of like an unspoken rule, take care for yourself, try to look good... you are thinking "Oh my gosh. I have to look great. I am wearing my letters."

While Kate, Sarah, Becca, Lizzie and Courtney are all members of upper tier houses, even members from lower tier houses feel pressure to give a good impression when they are in a position to be linked with their house. As Adrienne, the former president of lower tier house AMu said: "I will say that when we are going to fraternity houses for things, like, okay, they try to make themselves look nice. Don't look disgusting. Don't wear sweats. Like make your hair look decent. Like they try to put off that like when it comes to certain things and there is a rule for why if you're wearing your letters you don't look gross." Her remarks and the guidelines she gave her sisters for appearance when associating with fraternity members spoke to her desire to improve her sorority's reputation and image. Women's calculated use of both appearance and actions for crafting a desired image for their sorority speaks to huge importance of self-presentation and impression management for sorority members (Goffman 1959, Grazian 2006).

While women do express a strong desire to look nice and well put together for their own sake, sorority membership means that dress and appearance not only reflect well or poorly on the individual, but also on the sorority. Other college students often describe sorority women as overly concerned with appearance, shallow, or stuck up; however, the actions and choices described in interviews illustrate a strong desire to dress well not for one's self, but also for the reputation of one's sorority, indicating a deeper meaning to actions that can be perceived negatively on the individual level.

The reputation of Rho Delta was important for Stephanie, and she was very concerned that her sisters not present themselves in inappropriate ways, either in person,

or via Facebook, partially as a result of past incidents that gave her house bad press and a bad reputation.

We were put on social probation last year, like a year ago, and I was so embarrassed to be associated with that... Well they were having a lot of issues and they had a bus issue where at one of the parties, one girl's date...it was at a country club. They stole a golf cart and crashed it into something and then he punched a hole in the wall and the girl would not give the name of her date and say who it was, so we had to pay for it. The house did. I wasn't at the party, but...so I don't know the details. And then there was another incident at another party where a girl was like peeing, and like the people from the venue saw.

As a consequence, "in the Greek community everyone heard Rho Delta was on probation", causing Stephanie to work even harder to improve the image of her sorority, illustrating the importance of both appearance and actions in crafting a desired impression of her sorority.

Sorority Style in Class

During classes, sorority women interact with a wide range of students outside of Greektown, and the bars and parties that play a big part of the Greek system. Sorority women reported not being concerned about how GDIs (God damned independents) perceived them, but at the same time showed great devotion to styles that indicated both membership in their particular sorority and participation in the Greek system as a whole. Sorority members consistently listed the same fashions, styles, and brands as appropriate to wear and illustrative of their own wardrobes. However, they never reported direct pressure to wear sorority marked styles, instead referred to these style choices as personal choice.

Definitely, Ugg boots, Nike shorts, sorority apparel. They are like those sweatshirts and tee shirts that have like the appliqué things and it will be like a few different colors all layered on top of each other. Those are pretty popular. There are these like raincoats, like not really a raincoat, it is kind of like a pullover but it is for the rain and well, the ones that I see the most are like navy blue embroidered in white.

Nike shorts for sure. Uggs and leggings are gone for the most part, I think, but Nike shorts, absolutely.

I wear tennis shoes, my running shoes and shorts. I do prefer to wear my actual running shorts because I feel like they do look a little bit more presentable, I mean, they are American Eagle but you can't tell. They are like the Aerie brand but you can't tell. They don't have like a logo on them but they do look more like professional running shorts and they don't have like Nike or anything like that. But I do like to look, as far as like the running shorts, I do like to wear those running shorts versus other shorts and I do like to wear – tee shirts really don't matter – I guess hoodies do not really matter either but if I were to wear a hat, I like to wear a Nike hat or like a Mizzou hat.

Um, cloth headbands, Sperrys, letters a lot of times, obviously, like really casual attire but wearing a lot of makeup.

Most will wear yoga pants, some will wear those Nike shorts or whatever, that I will never be caught in, and then some will wear track shorts and leggings.

Greeks for sure always wear work out stuff to class.

It seems to be like you know like, you know, like leggings, Uggs, big shirts, hair in a messy ponytail but will still make sure your makeup is done. You know what I mean?.. Like you try to look like you didn't care.

I wear like Nike shorts and like a white V-neck which I do wear that stuff but I don't really think it is part of my sorority girl image.” Cara, describing her class clothing choices, but at the same time denying that she chose her wardrobe based on sorority identity, despite her outfit fitting the same mold as most other sorority women.

The brands and styles listed over and over as class attire followed strict guidelines- fitted yoga pants, short, tailored casual shorts, slim fitting sorority t-shirts,

casual shoes from trendy brands like Sperry and Nike. Women consistently described their preparations and clothing choices as “whatever is easiest” and “workout clothes and t-shirts”, however, when asked to go in to detail about what types casual work out wear was acceptable, it became clear that there were in fact fairly strict guidelines for casual class wear.

Overall, the description of “trying to look like you don’t care” was the most accurate standard for sorority class style. Women in sororities wore clothes that they identified as “casual” or “work out” clothes, consistently saying they put on “whatever” for class, but when asked for details, repeatedly defined their casual clothes as including short or medium length fitted running shorts, fitted sorority or designer logo t shirts, and yoga pants. For example, Nicole described her wardrobe of “gym shorts” as follows: “But most of the time they are medium length, not like the huge basketball ones, but just medium length ones. And then most days I wear a t-shirt, either a Chi Delta t-shirt, a Mizzou t-shirt.” Kate offered a similar rule for her choice of casual pants. “I don’t think I would wear super baggy, like oversized sweatpants, but I do have a pair and so I shouldn’t say that I wouldn’t because I do have a pair.” Kate also agreed that there are “rules, even for casual clothes.” Libby mentioned that she broke these unmentioned rules, but that there was some disapproval from her sisters. “Sweatpants? I’ll wear like guy sweatpants, but I get made fun of for it, so...” Chloe summed up the nature of sorority style for class, refuting the claim that class attire is not something women plan: “I mean it’s not like totally unthought out and so it’s just like what else would they be wearing?”

Um, makeup is a huge indicator for me just because it's like if you're – you might look more athletic if – yeah, you can totally tell the difference between like an athletic person and like a sorority girl who is wearing somewhat athletic Nike shorts". Sorority women consistently adhere to the same styles and looks, indicating that a visible display of belonging to a sorority relies heavily on appearance. Brand loyalty intersects with specific rules for presentation in constructing a visual indicator of belonging and membership via appearance.

The strictures of sorority style necessary to fit in and maintain an acceptable "sorority look" also require frequent purchases of brand name items. Devon's remarks highlight the importance (and the assumption of wealth) of clothing when discussing what her sorority wore during rush. Her acknowledgement that there was no talk of prices, or affordability correlates with the wardrobe expectations women needed to meet to show stylistic sorority affiliation. Pi Omega Pi, Devon's chapter, required J. Crew shorts and Sperry Top-Sider boat shoes, both common brands for sorority women. However, she did not mention the brands necessary during her interview, only discussing it in passing on her way out. Here is what members of Pi Omega Pi wore during one day of rush in 2012: "We had white shorts that were kind of a little bit longer, but not to the knee, but mid-thigh. Then we had T-shirts that had [our letters] on it, tucked that in with a little thin belt, like a brown belt, and then we had to have matching brown shoes." Devon responded affirmatively when asked if the outfit was 'pretty expensive', but followed that with the following comment when asked if there was any talk about what

would happen if a member couldn't afford it: "I think you're just maybe expected to, like you know it is going to be coming up and so if you can't afford it you have to save or...I really don't know." Her comments illustrate the tacit acceptance of consumption of material goods as a key component of belonging, and the extent to which women display sorority identity through both appearance and consumption.

Sorority Style Going Out

As with class attire and appearance, there are unwritten rules that sorority women internalize and adhere to when it comes to socializing. Sorority women consciously choose outfits that are dressier, flashier, and more revealing than they wore prior to joining to their sororities. Women report a deliberate change from high school outfits or outfits worn out with friends back home, suggesting that the sorority influence is strong. Additionally, sorority women dress to set themselves apart from other college women when at bars and parties. As with styles for class, women mentioned the same fashions over and over.

Heels are a big one. Heels and dresses at this school are big ones with going out. You can usually tell in a bar who is Greek or not just by who's wearing a dress.

I would wear something completely different than I would wear normally if I was just going out to get a beer somewhere, you know. I think if I was just doing the whole and I do have different like kind of types of outings like this, if I feel like I am going out with a certain group of friends like a sorority thing like someone's 21 Shots for example, I would wear something like sparkly or dressy and maybe even heels. That would be pushing it. I would definitely try to look nice if I was going to one of those places and kind of done up but not over the top just because...But we really do, in the sorority house, there was like "Oh, can I borrow this? Can I borrow that? Let's wear this so we don't look the same but

kind of have the same thing going on, you know, like everyone will wear dresses one night or like everyone...I know someone will come to your room and be like "Oh, you're wearing a dress? I didn't know you were wearing a dress". And it is like "Oh, put this dress on."

Dresses and skirts are. There are usually not too many women out at bars that have jeans on even if they are like skinny jeans and stilettos; it is more dresses and skirts at the bars.

I mean heels, looking nice like - looking cute; it was definitely important to get like a cute outfit going out. You wouldn't go out drinking in like a tee shirt and shorts or even like and a white tee, you know, that they are so used to wearing. It definitely is important.

I will wear makeup. That was another big thing, never wore makeup really before college. I will wear makeup when I go out.

You just like double the time to get ready because you agonize over everything. You will change outfits five times. You'll have friends come over and you'll go like "Oh, do you like this top" and you can just tell by their facial expressions if they do or they don't and if they like slightly hesitate, you'll go change which is so silly. But in those situations, I think you care more about how others perceive you so if your friends are telling you it doesn't look good, you're not going to wear it, you know, out I guess. Like for example when I go out, I can't tease my hair, not that I do it much so I will have a friend come over to do it for me.

Women also used the distinctions between their going out wardrobes at school and those at home to illustrate the standards of sorority style.

Going out here, even compared to going out at home in the summer, is completely different. Here it is a pencil skirt and a tank top. I normally wear flats, but most people wear heels. Or you wear skinny jeans and a cute top, but generally the norm is pencil skirt. Like a tight pencil skirt or a tight dress with flowy or tight tops. And back home you can go out at night and wear a sun dress or a cuter skirt

that isn't like that. It is like...I don't know if it is more preppy at home, but here it is like going out clothes. Jen

What I used to wear out was like what I would wear to school in high school, because I used to dress like, I would wear like nice clothes every day to school. Then I came here, and I realized that everyone wears like Bodycon dresses and skintight skirts and high heels and I didn't expect that. Like I would wear my Vans out when I went out...I know, I know. But now I wear the heels and big necklaces. Sarah

Sarah also mentioned a sorority sister of hers, describing her as

[The] biggest tomboy. On the Lacrosse team. Cutest little thing. Never wore makeup in her entire life. Had never kissed a boy until she came to school. She's adorable. Now when she goes out she wears everyone else's clothes and wears high heels and as uncomfortable as she looks in them, she still wears them out... A lot of girls were like "oh let me do your hair. Let me do your makeup for when you go out" because before she would just wear mascara and that was it.

The shift in style and appearance once women join a sorority indicates both the salience of appearance for sorority members and the extent to which women use their appearance to show belonging. For Jen and Sarah, the shift in style was necessary to fit in with their sorority sisters and display a suitable sorority appearance.

Unlike the more standardized sorority style of outfits worn to class, a large part of clothing choices for going out are meant to indicate a woman's particular sorority affiliation. Women agreed that while there was an overall "sorority look", they were especially concerned with representing their sorority's brand and reputation. In addition to describing what they wore to bars and how that would tell others what sorority they were in, sorority members were quick to describe stereotypical looks of other sororities

(usually, but not always, in negative terms). Clothes, makeup and hair styles for going out are important for two reasons: first, sorority members are not allowed to wear clothes or jewelry with their letters while drinking alcohol, so distinct styles serve as a mechanism of differentiating themselves from other sorority members and displaying their particular affiliation without the aid of overt identity markers. Secondly, socialization is one main reason why women join sororities, and socialization with fraternity men is a large component of Greek socialization. As such, sorority women use appearance as a way to express a flattering and appealing image of their sorority.

Lizzie, a member of Kappa, a top tier house known for classy and elegant members, defines the going out style of her sorority sisters by contrasting it with the style of other sororities: “Definitely if somebody is wearing something really promiscuous and like really revealing and stuff, I typically wouldn’t think that they are a Beta.” Along with Beta Sigma Beta, Zeta Beta Alpha is known for elegant, intelligent and classy members. As a result, Alex, a member of Alpha said that at bars and parties, members of her sorority could be identified by behavior more than appearance. Specifically, “they may be sticking together more than, like, they are not just going to leave a girl there and leave at, like, a fraternity or a bar. Like, we never really abandon our girls.” Chloe, a former member of upper tier house Omega Xi described her sorority’s going out style by saying “heels, looking nice like - looking cute; it was definitely important to get like a cute outfit going out. You wouldn’t go out drinking in like a tee shirt and shorts or even like jeans and a white tee, you know, that they are so used to wearing. It definitely is important.”

She contrasted the importance Omega Xis placed on wearing the ‘right clothes’ by saying that since she quit her sorority, she “[hasn’t] worn a pair of heels in the last six months.” She also noted that she could identify members of Omega Xi by “the way that they dress which I talked about like heels, a lot of makeup, a lot of trendy clothes.” Becca’s description of her former sorority sisters illustrates the use of going out style as a means of displaying and reinforcing the sorority’s brand. As a member of Phi Kappa, a top tier house known for wealthy and well dressed, Becca explained that Phi Kaps could be identified because they would be wearing “some kind of David Yurman on the wrist, some kind of like a nice Turnkey necklace, like a J. Crew type of necklace or just a big Turnkey necklace you could tell was very stylish but expensive. They would be wearing some kind of dress or skirt with really nice heels on, like attractive heels and, you know, would be carrying like a Louboutin bag or clutch or some kind of Coach clutch or bag”. Her listing of expensive brands as a marker of Phi Kappa style emphasizes the way that specific sororities use consumption as a specific marker of identity. . The use of specific styles that were distinguishable only by insiders, such as the expensive brands favored by Phi Kappa provides further illustration of the interplay between consumption, style, and appearance as indicators of belonging in a sorority. Another member of a top tier sorority, Courtney, described Omega Chi by saying “We are called the beauty queen house which sounds silly. Everyone is dressed to the 9’s when they go out. It is not like Phi Kap and like the money signs; I know I hate saying that. I know it sounds silly to say but, yeah, it is, you know, I don’t know how to explain it? Girls that care a lot about their

appearances. That sounds awful.” Her acknowledgement of the importance of appearance as a negative thing was fairly unique, and she expanded on the importance of looks in Omega Chi, explaining that plastic surgery was common in her sorority, far more so than other sororities. Not only was plastic surgery common in Omega Chi, it was also widely acknowledged and accepted.

Women also used standards and stereotypes of appearance and actions to define the women in their houses by contrasting them (generally negatively) with others. Courtney sums up the appearance choices of two houses known for attractive members by saying “well Pi Omega Pi... I am sure you have heard that one. Pi Omega Pi and Gamma Sigma Beta. Gamma Sig are the two that I like to say tend to have the highest hair , tend to wear the most makeup and tend to wear the like the littlest amount of clothes.” Her description matched those of other interviewees, including Victoria, a member of bottom tier house AMu, who categorized members of these chapters as “they’re all the slutty ones and all the prettiest girls.” Adrienne, also an AMu, said “but I know that a lot of people say that Gamma Sig’s are known for their big hair. So sometimes if I’m out at like a line or anything and I see a bunch of girls with like really big teased hair, I will just assume they are in Gamma Sig.” According to Lisa, members of Gamma Sigma Beta and Pi Omega Pi stand out because “Gamma Sig’s all have poufs, the big hair. And Pi Omega Pis are just kind of slutty pretty”. Sarah summed up the connection between particular styles and negative stereotypes of particular sororities by

saying “Gamma Sig. Yeah, if a girl is doing something very inappropriate or trashy, we usually deem them Gamma Sig.”

Stephanie felt that her sorority sisters wore a non-distinct uniform of short skirts and tight tops when going out, but acknowledged that her sisters in Rho Delta were easily identified by their behavior.

They are very loud. They act kind of like they own the place, the way they walk around. They know all the guys, like screaming, hugging, running up to them like they’ve never seen them in like five months ever though they saw them the day before. Just being kind of obnoxious. And then, that’s at least at first, then by the end of the night, then you’d probably see them in the bathroom throwing up.

Victoria also confirmed a negative stereotype of her sorority, acknowledging that “[I think that] anytime, like, anytime somebody sees somebody that’s bigger that is at a Greek thing, they are like “oh, she’s probably in AMu”.

Experiences of Resistance Regarding Style & Appearance

When it comes to resisting stereotypical sorority looks and choosing not to conform to the conventional beauty standards embodied by most members of the sorority community, several women interviewed expressed some desire to resist. These women also expressed respect for people who did resist, however, the overall view was that resistance was difficult, and conforming to sorority standards is far simpler and more comfortable. Women who didn’t fit the sorority archetype were perceived as outliers who were not fully integrated into the sorority lifestyle, either because they were

members of lower tier houses known for having less attractive members, or women who gained entrance into higher tier chapters as legacies. This does seem to echo the feelings many women outside of the Greek and university communities have about the perceived costs and benefits of not adhering to societal beauty norms (less chance of success in dating, employment, loss of confidence, etc.). However, the sorority women interviewed placed their unfulfilled desire to defy standards of appearance in a dialogue of ease and difficulty, one that puts them in the position of desiring individuality in dress, but choosing not to do so because of an internalized fear of reprisal and not being accepted. Specific example given of sorority members and Potential New Members who did not comply with beauty standards made clear that the consequences of insubordination are numerous. The degree to which standards of appearance are internalized is extremely high- Courtney, a member of Omega Chi, a top tier house known as the ‘beauty queen’ house, described the pressure in terms of panopticism, saying “You think everybody is watching and you kind of internalize your actions. I hate to say it; some girls succumb to pressure.” She followed this by mentioning that no one in her house ever overtly told another member that her appearance was not up to house standards, but that pressure existed in far more subtle forms, as she explained:

“...no one would be like “Oh, gosh, God, Court, you have put on 20 pounds. You need to hit the rec. No one would ever say that but, you know, you see everyone else around you taking good care of themselves, health wise, nutrition wise, working out.. We had a lot of nutrition majors so that was nice, too. So we would organize like runs or organize stuff like that so. But, no. Nobody would ever be like “Oh, God, Courtney, you are a heifer”.

Despite the lack of overt pressure or being called out on a deviant appearance by fellow sorority members, many of those interviewed described feeling uncomfortable if they looked different from other sorority members or college women. As a result, these feelings of discomfort prompted them to conform without any external compulsion from others. For example, Jen, a member of DTPhi, a higher tier house, described being at a fairly impromptu event and feeling extremely self-conscious about her clothing, saying: “I have gone to, like, one frat hallway party this year and it was after the football game and I had on like my jersey and my jeans and all of the other girls had dresses on and I was like, “Oh god.” Another member of DTPhi illustrated her feelings when faced with not fitting in in the Greek scene due to her clothes: “I remember I got here freshman year and I was wearing some sort of American apparel, like t-shirty skirt, it was cute, it was casual, and like a tank top with it and I went to a fraternity party and I was like, “I need to buy new clothes. I am not wearing the right thing right now.” For both of these members of a higher tier sorority, no one commented on their clothes at the parties they were attending, nor did sorority sisters or other friends comment negatively on their wardrobe choices later. In addition to a lack of comments, both had been wearing clothing that fit acceptable parameters for college style- in one case, a football jersey and jeans following a football game, in the other, a “cute” skirt and tank top from a popular label. However, simply seeing the that their clothing did not fit in with that worn by other women at the fraternity parties attended left both women feeling out of place, awkward, and uncomfortable, to the point where one specifically recalled experiencing the need to “buy

new clothes”, ones that would allow her to conform to sorority beauty standards. Despite resisting sorority appearance standards in extremely mild ways by wearing an outfit that would be acceptable in another context or an outfit that was more casual than others, these members felt strong pressure to conform to standards without any external prompting. In order to fully belong, sorority women not only need to maintain the proper appearance, they need to maintain it without prompting or discussion.

Kate, a sophomore member of top tier house Omega Chi, shared an incident from high school that prompted her to change her personal style from a more unique ‘hipster’ style to a more polished, preppy look, a style choice that continued after she joined Omega Chi.

In high school I remember when I was in a junior, and I’m still kind of this way, but when I was a junior I wasn’t like a hipster, but I definitely shopped at thrift stores and my friends were hipsters and they are total hipsters still, and I think that that changed. I think when it first changed was when I started dating my boyfriend, actually, because I went to a really small private school and I feel, not a lot of people, but it is more accepted to be vintage and that was considered kind of cool, and I loved it and I drove an old beat up car and that is kind of how I saw myself. When I started dating my boyfriend, he went to this really rich school where all the girls were very country-club dressed and I was kind of like...I feel like I didn’t really like see it happening, but looking back I can see how I started to not be so vintage and tried to lean more towards, I don’t know, that country-club kind of dressing and I think coming to school and being in a sorority definitely didn’t really change, just like affirmed the way I was dressing, if that makes sense. It is still something that I kind of struggle with because I don’t want to be necessarily dressing like...I don’t know, I think sometimes when I’m out on campus, like even today I probably look like a typical sorority girl just because of the brands that I’m wearing or, I don’t know, the style of the clothes that I’m wearing, and it is something that I wish I didn’t feel like I had to dress this way. I think it is kind of subconsciously, like when I’m shopping or whatever, I feel like I just kind of, you know, just that is what I buy, I don’t know. Sometimes I wish that I could just dress the way I used to.

Although Kate did state that she had changed her look before she joined her sorority, her discussion illustrated the subtle pressure that exists regarding women and appearance.

Further description of her high school experience confirmed this:

I think definitely people would notice [if she changed her style back to that of her high school days], but I mean there are some girls in Omega Chi that are that way. But, I don't know. I don't think it necessarily changed when I became a Omega Chi, because obviously it changed when I was still in high school when I was dating my boyfriend because they were all blonde with their pearls and I showed up. I think maybe this is a big thing. I showed up to his football game and it was the first time I had ever been around that student group, like in the student seating, and I showed up and they had some theme of a Western or whatever and all of the girls were in bright pink plaid shirts with their short denim cutoffs and boots and pearls, and I showed up with my black skinny jeans and like a black shirt and, I don't know. I just didn't look like everyone else and I didn't get the whole Western memo and it would have been weird if I dressed up Western because I didn't go to that school.

However, though Kate would have also felt awkward had she adopted the Western look of girls at her boyfriend's school since she didn't attend the school, she definitely noticed and felt uncomfortable, and in her words, "just remember[ed] feeling so out of place. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I cannot dress like this at the next thing," just because I already was an outsider and I didn't want to be even more of an outsider. So I think that is kind of when I started to not be so, I don't know, individual." Joining a sorority provided an impetus to continue that conformity, as Kate currently followed contemporary social styles, both for casual wear and party wear.

Despite describing the ongoing subtle pressures to conform, and the high degree

to which they internalized these pressures and monitored their appearance to adapt to accepted sorority style, members still spoke of the desire to present themselves in a more unique way using their appearance as a medium. Lizzie, a junior member of Beta, an upper tier house, explained her feelings thusly:

I don't know, like if like I personally like we're talking about hipsters and stuff like that like there is like a girl who has her own sense of style and like it works and stuff. I'm like I wish I were like that. Like I wish I was more of an individual like I feel like that all the time. It's just like I feel so ordinary and bland and stuff and just like I wish I had more like a more unique style or a more whatever but I guess I'm lazy. I just go with whatever works.

Kate expressed similar feelings, saying “[and I] started to conform, which I hate, because I think conforming is the stupidest thing, but I'm human and so what can I say?” Her brief statement encapsulates the desire for resistance, the simultaneous difficulty of resisting standards, and the enormous pressure to conform- both as a sorority member and a normal person who wants to fit in.

Chloe, a former member of Omega Xi, an upper tier house, discussed the pressures to conform and the difficulty of resisting from the opposite side of the experience. Chloe dressed in a uniquely stylish hipster fashion, and she had done so even as a member of her sorority. When discussing style and fashion choices, Chloe explained that she was not shunned or judged for her distinct style, but rather was admired and envied by her sorority sisters. She recalled many of her sorority sisters looking at her clothes and expressing their own desire for a more unique style, saying:

I will say, though...there were a lot of times where the girls would be like “Gosh, I love how you are so different like I love that you have like such an eccentric style and you know and I’m just like – “You can do this; too”; it just takes a little bit more confidence to like stand out, you know, so...

Chloe attributed this to sorority women being less confident in their style choices, and being more devoted to conformity and control in the realm of appearance, something that she did not experience. As a devotee of unique style and a major in textile and apparel management, Chloe acknowledged that while she had never strictly adhered to sorority style norms, she did wear substantially more makeup while an active member, illustrating that the correspondence to sorority norms is widespread, even for those who deviate far more than others. She also used the focus on a narrow range of acceptable styles and brands as a reason she grew tired of her sorority, saying:

Girls would always compliment me on like what I was wearing or like my sense of style but then they would follow up with like “Who makes that” or like “What brand is that” and it’s just like “I don’t fucking know” like that doesn’t matter at all to me but like, I just think we were on a different level. Like I don’t really know if they were that concerned about that but that is what was like cool for them like that was their version of cool.

The brands and styles that Chloe’s sorority sisters were concerned with are those that Lizzie, Libby, and Kate sought out to maintain their position as stylish and acceptable members of their sororities. For Chloe, this narrow range of acceptability in appearance was stifling; however most members who expressed frustration with their own choices to conform did embrace the conformity in practice, as their discussions of conventionality and sorority style illustrated. However, Chloe did succumb to pressure to conform to

sorority standards while in Omega Xi- discussing differences in her wardrobe, she jokingly said that “I haven’t worn a pair of heels in the last six months”, which is the exact time she has been out of her sorority.

Limitations in Sorority Options for Non-Conformists

For women who did resist conforming to beauty standards, or who were involuntarily unable to maintain the ideal image for a sorority member, the options for sorority membership were limited. As nearly every interviewee mentioned, lower tier houses gained their reputations mainly because their members often did not fit the sorority standards for appearance. For example, Delta Mu, widely agreed to be the lowest ranked house on campus, was described as

Delta Mu is kind of known as Delta Moo, like a cow...because I guess they are seen as having heavier set girls.- Anna, Omega Chi

It’s sad but like Delta Mus are not necessarily known for being... well you are taught to think of Delta Mus as not necessarily being that pretty ... you know they don’t necessarily base their recruitment as heavily off appearance as some other sororities.- Becca, former Phi Kap

Delta Mu, you know, which has a terrible reputation because people think that the girls are all overweight.- Chloe, ex Omega Xi

Delta Mu [is] just trying to get their numbers in...so they will get girls that you wouldn’t typically think of as sorority girls when you think of, like, a stereotypical sorority girl.- Libby, DTPhi

So many times, I will hear like, “Oh my God, you know, she is Delta Mu. I never would have guessed. I totally can’t see her there. You know, she doesn’t fit with them”.- Courtney, Omega Chi

Members of Delta Mu were generally described as overweight, not attractive, and not ‘typical sorority girls’, who don’t fit the desired standard for sorority appearance.

Courtney’s comments about seeing someone attractive and being surprised to find out she is a member of Delta Mu, based on the degree to which her appearance deviated from the sorority norm. The extent to which women who did not fit the beauty standards held up by sororities were able to be involved in Greek life is dependent on their joining a bottom tier house. As Adrienne, the former president of new, and bottom tier house, AMu explained why she joined her chapter, and how appearance did not really play a role at AMu:

I definitely know that I didn’t want to be forced into their beauty standards and you don’t walk into a house.... I always that like a lot of houses you would walk in and you would feel just like gross about yourself. Like, you just feel okay, why didn’t I brush my hair like all these people like look nice.... So I think that we are very, very diverse group of girls in my chapter and that is apparent and diverse in every way like ethnically... just super super diverse so you don’t feel like it is like cookie-cutter at all... my chapter would have meetings and say we don’t want to have a stereotype, we don’t want to be like this. We don’t want to be like that.

The lack of adherence to sorority stereotypes allowed a more diverse group of women to participate in sorority life by joining sorority chapters such as AMu and Delta Mu, however, the price of admission is these sororities’ low rankings.

Another way in which women who do not conform to sorority style are able to join in Greek is to become a member of upper tier houses is by joining a chapter as a legacy. A legacy refers to a woman whose mother, sister, or other relative was a member of the sorority, and legacy status usually gives rushees preferential treatment during recruitment. Before a Potential New Member (PNM) goes through recruitment, she fills out a form which includes legacy status. At the same time, family members write a letter to the sorority chapter informing them that their daughter/sister, etc., will be going through rush at the University. Courtney described the importance of legacies at her top tier house, discussing how members had to be careful in judging PNMs on appearance, because “We might lose her [a less attractive member] and she could be a legacy which means that her grandmother was a Omega Chi, her mom was a Omega Chi. Because that’s where a sorority tends to get the most money from, the most involvement from, so you want to keep it in the family.” The bids offered to legacies are a courtesy, but also a pragmatic move designed to insure financial contributions from former members.

While less attractive women and women who don’t observe sorority fashion and style conventions do make use of legacy status to join top tier sororities, this strategy has its negative effects on both the member and the chapter itself. Often, less attractive members of elite houses are presumed to be legacies, and the inclusion of too many unattractive legacies can damage a chapter’s reputation over time. Courtney expanded on that point, saying “Omega Chi [wouldn’t] have picked them as a #1 if they were going through recruitment but because they are a legacy, sometimes with that, it sounds so

weird to say but sometimes it's like even appearance wise, exceptions will be made." The knowledge that legacy status allows for exceptions to be made appearance wise is widespread, and common amongst sorority members- including legacies themselves. Again, Courtney emphasized the frustration some in her chapter feel about legacies who are less attractive or not Omega Chi material, describing their attitudes thusly: is "Usually with those girls, it is Oh, God, she is a legacy" but everyone knows you have to let them in and some of my best friends are Omega Chi legacies. But not all legacies are like that; I don't want that to come across. It's kind of like one of those things "Oh, she only got in because she is a legacy" but everyone knows you have to keep them." Anna was another member of Omega Chi who acknowledged that less attractive women in her top tier house were often assumed to be legacies, and legacies were presumed to be less attractive, saying that "there are girls in there that people will be like, "Well, how did she get in, you know. She must be a legacy because she is not that pretty or something". Chloe also mentioned that less attractive or stylish women were able to join Omega Xi as legacies, but that once in this elite sorority, their experiences differed from those of members who did fit the sorority mold and maintain the sorority standard appearance, and they did not fully belong as members.

I remember there was this one girl that was going through rush and she was a legacy...and since she was a legacy, like you really can't cut her but like she just had this really crazy style, wore a ton of like crazy makeup kind of, and like a little larger and I just remember like I can think about how they would have acted and just kind of like laughed and been like "But did you see her, like really, she is obviously not going to fit in" like one of those kind of things. You know, not outwardly like she is fat and she has horrible makeup but like kind of implying

that, you know, she is not going to fit in with us.

When asked about the experience less attractive legacy members had once in her sorority, Chloe explained that though they were formally and outwardly welcomed and involved, the reality was quite different, and these women often did not fit in very well.

I don't know if they do the same kind of things; they might kind of be in their own group. Um, I think that they might not fit into the whole like even within the sorority and I've heard since I have left that it's become more segmented and segregated and they probably don't go to the bars, you know, they probably find other things that they want to do. I definitely think that other people would not go out of their way to be like "Do you guys want to go with us"? You know, like I think it would be like "We are all going out like we always do" and like if they were out at the bar, they probably would be like "Whoa, what are they doing here" you know and like they might say hello but like after that, chances are they are not going to like really accept them... I think it might have something ---gosh, I hate to say this because this is not how I think but it definitely has something to do with like if those girls were with like, you know, popular girls, like what would they be looked at, you know...

While women who resisted conforming to sorority appearance archetypes (or were unable to conform to them, due to being less attractive) were able to use their status as legacies to gain access to elite houses, it is clear that transgressions in this regard were not accepted overall. Members' frequent bracketing of less attractive legacies illustrates their position as people who were let in despite the wishes of the chapter as a whole, and who had a very different experience than other members once in the chapter, showing again the importance of appearance in determining the extent to which a woman belonged within her sorority. Even women who were legacies or double legacies suffered

from inclusion, as the relationship between appearance and fitting in is strong, and the consequences for transgressions severe.

Sorority members' recounting of specific individuals in the Greek community who did not adhere to the widely acknowledged standards of sorority appearance further illustrated how breaching these standards was cause for comments and judgment. One incident which underscored the importance of adhering to unspoken rules of dress and appearance was the unprompted mention of a rushee who wore a textured sunflower vest and bowling shoes, an outfit that clearly did not fit standards of sorority style, or college style in general. Maria, a member of DTPhi, first commented on this situation, saying:

I know one AMu who isn't very stylish, but that is because she is very, very kind of...not in her own world, but very much doesn't care what other people think about her. Which I was like, you know, "kudos to you." Like, she walked around rush with a sunflower vest on [and] bowling shoes.

While Maria described her personal reaction as respectful of this girl's alternative style, saying "I mean, they are wearing it because they like it. It is not my place to judge. But, I mean, I guess in a sorority view they wouldn't be the most stylish girls and they are not, I guess, the most attractive women as well", she acknowledged that other members of her sorority would not feel the same way, saying that wearing such a different outfit in rush at ADPI "...wouldn't go over well", something she knew for sure, "because girls in my sorority have talked about her... and they were like, "Oh my god, like, I cannot believe she wore that" and they were like seniors".

Here, a member of an upper tier house defended the rushee's decision to wear clothing that didn't conform to the standards set by other sorority women and potential new members. However, her approval was clearly linked to the fact that the girl in the sunflower vest ended up joining one of the bottom tier houses, which includes more diverse members, as it is a new chapter. Adrienne, the former president of A Mu, was quick to point out that her chapter was eager to accept any potential new member, in order to get adequate numbers for the house. Therefore, AMu gained a reputation of a very non-selective, unattractive house, which perpetuated its position in the bottom tier of the University's sororities, creating a cycle based on looks and exclusivity. The extent to which looks tie into sorority tiers was clearly illustrated by Adrienne, who described the diversity of her house using the example of ordering t-shirts for a sorority event:

My chapter ... it was weird going through T-shirt sizes ... that was like the biggest headache. All the other ones would be like we will have 150 smalls and like 13 mediums and a large. That would be a thing. In my chapter, it is definitely - you are going to be like okay, we are going to have three triple XLs and like 50 larges."

Adrienne went on to say:

Like it is just weird that you can just look at that kind of thing because it just wasn't based ... and the way we voted, we didn't ever see people. Like someone would bring a name into the chapter and they would go like this is the person and this is their qualities. These are the things they did in high school, this is their GPA and this is their major and then we would vote on them. And the way our voting process works, if you didn't – it is really hard not to vote someone in like that so basically we would never see these people before they would get there, which I think makes a huge difference because the other sororities do that for more recruitment where they have all seen the people and they will be like, okay,

my chapter has done this too, this girl looks like this and they would be like alright, she is out, you know?

In AMu, a bottom tier house, potential new members were not voted on while members viewed their pictures, as in many other houses, but rather while discussing high school activities and grades. This, along with their need for new members in general led to a situation where someone who didn't fit the mold of a sorority woman was allowed access to sorority life. When I interviewed Victoria, another member of AMu, I asked her if she knew "sunflower vest girl", and she immediately knew who to whom I was referring, describing the woman and her style by saying:

I think that's awesome, because I could care less what you look like if you're nice and you're going to get along with everybody else. But, I think that is a really bold move, just because it is not typically what people do and that people...like she stood out among everybody else.

However, like Adrienne, Victoria recognized that her chapter was unique because

...some other houses would say about that particular member, that because she wore that she didn't get asked to be in other houses, I might think. Because, to be honest, I think that AMu is kind of seen as like the reject house, because we're new and a lot of girls don't want to go to a house where there's like a lot of new people. And a lot of people like in my rush class are bigger women or not like your typical looking sorority people, so I think that also affects how the rushees see us. They're like "oh, I don't want to be a part of that house with those misfits." So, um, but, I think that was a bold move and I think that's awesome.

Despite the fact that "sunflower vest girl", as Maria dubbed her, did get a bid and eventually join Adrienne and Victoria's sorority, where her non-conformist style was

accepted, this should not be viewed as complete acceptance of her decision to deviate from the norm. Lisa, also a member of DTPhi, brought up the same rushee, even though she was on the administrative end of rush and did not meet or even see her:

I know there was one girl last year that came in with a sunflowered vest... I never saw the girl with the sunflower vest, but everybody walks into my little office and was like, "We cannot keep this girl. Why does she keep coming back to our house?" And I'm like, "on paper, she looks great. She has the community involvement. I can't tell you that we can't keep her, because she does her stuff and, I mean, just tell her if she becomes a member not to wear her sunflower vest if it embarrasses you.

Like Maria, Lisa acknowledged that the reason "sunflower vest girl" did not get called back to DTPhi was her unique and unstylish attire. Without prompting, Nicole, a member of Chi Delta, another sorority, brought up the same rushee and her unusual clothing. Nicole said: "I know that a couple girls came in and, I mean, it sounds really bad to say I felt sorry for them, but it is just kind of like...one girl had on this really crazy sunflower vest. When I told Nicole that she was not the only one to bring up the unique attire of this potential new member, she agreed, saying "I was gonna say I'm pretty sure someone else would have to mention that." Like Maria, Nicole clearly noticed and categorized a sunflower vest and bowling shoes as a deviant outfit in the sorority world, enough to warrant a mention, despite being worn by one of the over a thousand potential new members going through rush. However, unlike Maria, Nicole couched her discussion of sunflower vest girl in terms of sympathy, rather than admiration, in her view, if not the views of her other sorority sisters. Nicole described her reaction further:

I've met a lot of people in college like that and they may not be your stereotypical person, but they are really a cool person and so she could definitely be like that just because she wore a sunflower vest, I don't know, but things like that. You know, you're walking around getting ready to talk to your next person and you see that and you're just like, "Oooh, what made her want to come through recruitment?" That's the first question that came to my mind when I saw girls that weren't the stereotype, I guess... At first my impression was kind of like, "Oh my gosh, why are you here? You might be getting made fun of," that kind of thing. I tend to have empathy for people, try to feel what they feel, but then I was like, was her mom real preppy and made her come through this and she doesn't want to be here, or is she truly trying to meet people and come out of her shell, come out of her box and change things. Or maybe, like you said, that eccentric personality, she might love this kind of stuff but she may not dress like that. For some people that's how they are. Those were the questions that ran through my head. Like, what is she doing here? What's her reason? I mean, some people do like dressing like that still, so to each their own, I suppose. I was just curious what made her decide to come through this process where you're judged and then, you know, you wear something like that. I mean, she might be a really strong person who doesn't care.

For Nicole, the importance of conformity to the standards of rush- straightened hair, stylish skirts or preppy shorts, and trendy shoes and jewelry is so deeply ingrained that anyone who violates these unmentioned rules is immediately subject to being marked as an outsider and an object of pity. While she tried to provide an answer that showed acceptance, her words about why this girl chose to go through rush, a process that she freely admitted judged quite heavily by looks, her final, slightly incredulous supposition that sunflower vest girl "might be a really strong person who doesn't care" illustrates the inevitability of judgment and critique of appearance and fashion during the rush process and sorority life in general. Clearly, one is supposed to care about such matters, and to appear not to do so invites a reaction, which may be admiring or pitying.

In any case, both Nicole and Maria did offer acceptance of this rushee's eccentric attire, however, their acceptance was clearly predicated on her joining another chapter, namely a lower tier house, one that is not known for stylish or attractive members. By going out of their way to mention how well sunflower vest girl fits in to the sorority she joined, both women who discussed her attire were able to simultaneously conform to and acknowledge resistance to beauty standards. However, resistance is clearly conditional- Nicole, Maria and Lisa were fully aware that their chapters (one middle-low tier, one top tier) would not include this potential new member, as she did not fit the mold their chapters desired. Drawing distinctions between chapters allows women to create a narrative of acceptance of deviant appearances, while at the same time highlighting the importance of a uniform appearance as a membership criterion for their own chapters, showcasing the interplay between appearance and belonging within the Greek system itself. The existence of Adrienne and Victoria's chapter and others like it offers members of all sororities the ability to claim the Greek system's acceptance of women who either fail or choose not to conform to beauty and fashion standards. In reality, the informal tier system belies the appearance of acceptance, as sororities that include such members become subject to harsh criticism and judgment.

On the opposite end of the style spectrum, two other interviewees brought up a member of an elite sorority, who is known widely on campus for her revealing and flashy clothes. Adrienne, the former president of bottom tier sorority AMu described her thusly:

...she wears whatever the hell she wants to wear when in school. She will just wear basically cloth wrapped around her body in the form of a dress. Like her dresses are always really short. Like the other day, she was wearing like a leather mini skirt and a short leather jacket. Parts of her body are always hanging out.

Adrienne mentioned this particular individual while discussing style standards on Mizzou's campus, and contrasting Abby's choices with her own wardrobe selections for going out to trendy campus bars and parties. As Adrienne put it, "There is one girl in particular on this campus that everyone knows her because of her clothes". More precisely, 'everyone' on campus knows of Abby, not only because of her flashy clothes, but because of the implied contrast between her revealing outfits and her position on campus. According to Adrienne and other interviewees, Abby is a member of Alpha, a high level house, known for intelligent, dignified, and classy members. She is also a Broadcast Journalism major, which is a difficult position to obtain, and generally includes women who follow hegemonic standards of conservative beauty.

This particular sorority member's violation of hegemonic standards of beauty (and female sexuality) was also mentioned by Cara, a member of high tier house Omega Xi. Cara had been discussing the level of conformity in sorority members' social wardrobes, saying that "[she felt] like dressing like a slut at least is really encouraged when you are around other people who dress that way", meaning other members of the sorority community. When asked to clarify what dressing like a slut involved, Cara responded with a description of one woman in particular, later confirmed to be Abby, saying:

You know, just the low-cut shirts and really short stuff and, I don't know. I feel like ...I saw one girl one time like wearing this teeny tiny little black like spandex skirt and like a midriff tank top. You could see like her whole entire stomach and she had on like a teeny tiny like leather jacket. And it is like "Are you for real?...I just see her all the time and it is like, "put some clothes on."

Both Cara and Adrienne's reactions to Abby's clothing choices show the narrow range of acceptable clothing choices for sorority members, regardless of the status level of their house. While Cara and Adrienne, like Nicole, Lisa and Maria did not mention specific standards of dress, nor did they state specific limits of tolerance for diverse methods of dress, their disapproval of Sunflower Vest Girl and Abby's chosen styles confirms that context is essential. The notice that members of very different sororities gave to these two fashion outliers refutes previous assertions that deviation from the norm is acceptable.

Conclusion

For sorority women, the widespread acceptance of and adherence to conventional standards of appearance indicate many things. First, the importance of maintaining an acceptable appearance via the use of brands and styles highlights the salience appearance has for determining belonging in a sorority, and the intersection of style, appearance, and brand consumption as key components of belonging. The extent to which women display their sorority membership using appearance encompasses many aspects of a sorority woman's experience. By monitoring actions and appearance when wearing letters, women work to shape and maintain their individual sorority's carefully crafted

organizational identity. Women also frequently report the necessity of changing their style and appearance once they join their sororities, illustrating the importance looks and appearance holds in constructing and displaying organizational membership and belonging. Secondly, sorority styles that enable women to fully fit in to the stylistic expectations of their chapters are closely linked to financial ability to consume high end brands. The interplay between style, financial status, and appearance shows the extent to which sorority women focus on physical appearance as more than simply an illustration of shallow conformity, but rather use appearance as a means of crafting and maintaining belonging in their organizations. Finally, examples of women whose appearances are considered deviant clearly show the degree to which sorority membership and full belonging in a chapter are linked to appearance. The widespread acknowledgement that less attractive women can gain entrance to the sorority system as legacies to “good” houses, where they are considered not to fully fit in, as well as the bracketing of chapters such as Delta Mu and AMu as the “ugly” houses shows that sorority women frequently use appearance as a determinant of belonging in the Greek system or in a particular sorority. Additionally, those women who do deviate from broadly accepted standards of appearance are repeatedly singled out, as discussions of both sunflower vest girl and Abby show. By highlighting women whose appearance renders them outsiders, sorority women illustrate the rigidity of sorority style standards as well as the salience of conformity in ensuring a satisfactory and comfortable sorority experience.

CHAPTER 9: THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP: WHY JOIN A SORORITY?

Fitting in and making friends on a huge campus

While sorority women described many motivations and reasons for joining the Greek system at Mizzou, several consistent themes emerged when asked to discuss what prompted them to go through recruitment and become a member of sorority. The three most common reasons given for joining a sorority were fitting in and making friends on a huge campus, being involved with campus activities, and family connections with a particular sorority or the Greek system in general.

For students at the University of Missouri, with its current population of nearly 27,000 undergraduates, moving on to campus and commencing studies as freshmen can be extremely overwhelming. Since sorority rush occurs prior to the official start of the semester, women who choose to rush move on to campus over a week prior to other freshmen. For women who rush, this early start provides an opportunity to get to know others in their dorms, and, for those who join sororities, affords them the ability to enter the official school year with a built in group of friends and a sense of belonging. As Becca says, "... it definitely gave me an identity when I was kind of lonely and first coming to school and kind of lost on this huge campus. It definitely gave me a sense of home." Lizzie expanded on the sense of belonging and fitting in that being a part of her sorority provided her during her freshman year, linking the experience of having friends

in her dorm who were part of her pledge class with feeling like she fit in and “knew her place” during her first year on campus:

So my freshman year, like I went to stuff and I lived around girls and my two best friends freshman year lived across the hall and right next door to me and they also happened to be in Beta and I guess that’s just how it worked cause we went to like all of our stuff together and we lived right next to each other and we like formed our own little friendship circle and stuff but since we weren’t in the all-girls dorm with like the majority of people in our pledge class, we didn’t like really know everyone else that much, I guess and just like I generally know my place like freshman year.

Students who came to the university from out of state attached an additional sense of import the idea of sororities as a means of fitting in and finding a sense of home and community on a huge campus. Because more than 75% of Mizzou undergraduates come from Missouri, those from out of state are likely to be the only person from their high school on campus, an experience Stephanie mentioned when describing why she chose to go through sorority rush and join her sorority:

Because I’m the only person from my high school who came here.... So I was like, okay, I might as well do it... Yeah, just because I didn’t know anyone coming here, and I’m pretty shy naturally. In high school I was more shy and I did theater to try to bring me out of myself, and whenever I was on stage I felt really comfortable because I felt like I was performing, so...I was looking for, and I knew I wasn’t going to do theater here...so I was looking for something to bring me out of myself and sort of force me into a social situation I guess.

These sentiments also motivated Courtney to join her sorority when she arrived at MU: “I think for me, it was initially I joined it and it has been almost just like a family away from home being an out-of-state student especially so for me, being in a sorority is like a sense

of instant community almost.” Devon echoed Courtney’s feelings, pointing out that to her,

It [her sorority] meant a lot coming in as a freshman. I didn’t know anybody coming to Mizzou because I’m from out of state, so joining a sorority was a way for me to kind of make Mizzou smaller and whether it being in my sorority or other sororities, you know, or anything like that, but I think that being in the sorority that I am in now I share a lot of qualities and a lot of interests with the girls, so they have become my best friends.

Devon’s comments are also interesting because they provide insight in to the importance (or lack thereof) of joining a particular sorority. Although Devon arrived at Mizzou intending to (and becoming) become a member of Pi Omega Pi, the chapter of which her mother and grandmother had both been members, she felt that being a part of the Greek system in general, “whether it being in my sorority or other sororities” would provide her with that sense of connection and belonging at a huge school far away from home. Cara, too, felt that participating in rush and becoming a part of the Greek system would give her a feeling of belonging at a highly populated campus away from her home state. She described her feelings thusly:

I’m from out of state so I came to Mizzou without knowing anybody and my mom and my dad were both Greek and they encouraged it and it wasn’t really something that I ever necessarily pictured myself doing but I never pictured myself not doing it, I guess, but my mom always encouraged it and she was like, you know, when you are in a sorority in college, you will have all these friends and it will be so great and like it won’t even matter if you go a zillion miles away because you can rush. So that is pretty much the main reason why I did it to meet people.

Again, Cara attached importance to being a member of a sorority in general as a way to feel at home and a part of her college community.

While sorority members tend to be very attached to their particular chapters, especially during their first years, it is interesting to note that potential new members seem to look at the Greek experience itself as providing a sense of identity and belonging, rather than one chapter in particular being the mode by which this is provided. Over and over, sorority women described the placement system during recruitment as placing women ‘where they’re supposed to end up’, ascribing a sense of destiny and meaning to the process. Stephanie used this phrasing when discussing how she became a member of Rho Delta, after getting cut from her first choice, Alpha: “[s]o I think it ended up working out. They say that you end up where you’re supposed to be, and I think I did.” Nicole described ending up in Chi Delta similarly, echoing Stephanie’s sentiments nearly verbatim, down to the first choice chapter. “So I did want Alpha, but now where I am I would not see myself in that house. So I do think chance worked out and I did end up in the house that I was supposed to be in.” Even though Jen was positively aware of the reputation of the sorority she eventually joined, and had very favorable impressions of the DTPhi while going through rush, she still did not list DTPhi as her first choice, instead she “put Alpha down as my first choice. And I think part of that had to do with the conversations I had, but part of it had to do with I didn’t know much about these sororities and those were two I heard that were good, so that was why I put them down.”

What stands out from these three women’s experiences is not that they all ended

up being cut from their top choice chapter, which happened to be the same, but that all, as sophomores who had lived in their sorority chapter for nearly a year, felt that they had joined the right sorority for them, regardless of their initial hopes and preferences. Lisa felt similarly, saying the following describing her eventual joining of DTPhi after being cut from Phi Kappa, where she was a legacy: “it turned out the way it was supposed to turn out. And it was always so cliché. Everybody’s like “trust the system. You’ll end up where you belong.” Adrienne, who joined her sorority as president during the chapter’s first year on campus, commented astutely “girls that do that don’t really end up caring which chapter they get in. At the end of the day, you know what I mean, they can get in any of the chapters and be happy because they know they will make out of it like what they want.” While there are in fact noticeable differences between the fifteen Panhellenic sororities on campus, it seems that they all provide their members with the same benefits when it comes to creating a sense of belonging and forging an identity on a huge college campus. The sense of belonging provided by sororities, regardless of which individual chapter a woman joins shows the importance of membership itself as an identity characteristic, beyond the identity that comes from belonging to a particular organization with a particular image.

Also noteworthy is the extent to which sorority women discuss their main motivations in joining a sorority as being centered on friendship and belonging. Outside of the collegiate Greek system, many, especially college students who are not a part of Greek life and identify themselves as GDIs (God Damned Independents), view sororities

and fraternities as organizations made up of people who buy their friends or buy belonging. While money and class privilege have been and remain prominent components of the Greek system in American colleges and universities, the discourse provided by sorority members interviewed focused on making friends through joining a sorority as a goal in itself, not making friends using financial ability to do so. In Anna's words "I think a lot of people when they just get started, especially as a freshman, they see it as more just making friends." As members progressed through their college experiences, the salience of financial status became more apparent and relevant to their sorority experiences; however, their narratives of initial motivations to join were heavily centered on belonging and fitting in on campus.

Campus Involvement

A second common reason that sorority women gave when asked why they chose to go through recruitment and join a chapter was the opportunities for involvement and campus leadership that Greek life provided. Adrienne, who was the first president of new chapter Alpha Kappa Mu, emphasized the import of Greek life in campus activities. "Also on this campus it is really hard to get involved in other activities if you are not Greek, which is lame and terrible, but it is just kind of the way it is." Adrienne is correct in her assessment of on-campus activities. At Mizzou, as at many other large public universities, Greek organizations provide numerous opportunities for structured involvement on campus, via events such as Homecoming skit contests, parade floats, banner creation; as well as Greek Week, an entire week that celebrates Greek life on

campus via contests, sporting events, philanthropic events, and social activities. In addition to these events, most campus-wide activities such as rec sports leagues often are heavily comprised of teams made up of fraternity and sorority members. While other organizations such as clubs, residence halls are welcome to participate in homecoming festivities and other events, in reality, these groups are vastly outnumbered by Greek organizations.

Adrienne shared many detailed of her unique experience as the former president of AMu, including her negative initial impressions of the Greek system. As a freshman, Adrienne didn't go through rush, as she found Greek life shallow and conformist. However, "then this new one got involved on campus and really I joined it because I wanted to be the president." As president of AMu, a new sorority joining the ranks of Mizzou's established Greek system, Adrienne had numerous opportunities for involvement, leadership, and participation in campus events. Her decision not to join an established chapter was based partially out of her negative views of Greek life and partially because of her desire to build AMu from the ground up. In her own words:

I thought that it would be interesting to start a chapter and I thought it would be good to kind of ...I was really bored because I wasn't doing anything and so I thought it would be a good way to build something on this campus. So that is why I joined it and then now it is interesting just to watch it grow and see what it went from a group of girls that didn't know how to be Greek to an actual sorority with actual housing that has been here for a couple of years now and it is an interesting thing.

Adrienne also used her experiences as a charter member and president to shape her ideas of what makes someone a good sorority sister:

If they care about the sorority but also that they are there for you as a person and they are involved in the sorority and that they want to do what is best and actually like care about not just the reputation and just other members of the chapter which I find it comes out, especially now, being a charter member, in the beginning, it was like a lot of the girls that worked really hard, we didn't have a house. We didn't have anything and so we have to work really hard. We had to meet off campus and meet different places. We really really tried to start this chapter so it took a lot, a lot of work. And then slowly the charter members would just drop off. And it is like, oh yeah; well I don't want to pay anymore. I have to do some other things. So we will just drop the chapter which I could never ever do. Because I have invested so much time in this sorority. It wasn't like a sorority for me. Like I didn't have fun dance parties or anything like that. I didn't have date parties. They have them now but I didn't have them at the beginning. And the work I did. I had to work with the nationals. I had to do so much for it. Now, I could never drop. And it is weird to see the girls that stayed were not necessarily my favorite people in the beginning but now I think that they are my strongest sorority sisters and the ones, kind of like you know they are there for the chapter. They are going to be there for you no matter what it comes down to and we have gone through a lot of crap.

Her difficulties and overall experience in taking a huge leadership role and her massive involvement on campus due to being the president of a new chapter were unique, but her use of a sorority as a means to get involved on campus and in leadership roles was not. For example, Lizzie discussed how being involved in Beta offered her the opportunity to continue creative activity that she had enjoyed in high school: "I really liked, like I said, doing creative things like taking pictures and doing like design-type stuff so I like looked up the positions – there was one that was like documenting chapter history and just kind of like doing that so I kind of like "Oh this is like maybe a way I can relive my glory

yearbook days”. Anna proudly talked about her involvement as a member of Omega Chi’s executive board.

I am involved in Omega Tau Chi and I have held several leadership positions within that. I have been on exec and I do a lot of their philanthropy Interviewee: Well, I mean being on exec, you put a lot of work into things and how everything is going especially my part, I did a lot of philanthropy stuff, so it gets frustrating when you put a lot of work into it and then there will be people that don’t show up or don’t really show you the respect that you deserve but then there are also people that would go above and beyond and help you out as much as possible.

Sorority women often echoed Lizzie’s sentiment that” being in a sorority was like a way to kind of continue being involved” and described this as a strong motivation to join Greek life.

Family Connections

Family background also played a role in women’s involvement in sorority life at all stages, from choosing to go through rush, to joining a sorority, to picking a particular chapter. Stephanie and Cara both expounded on the role that their parents’ involvement in Greek life had played in their decisions to become sorority members. According to Stephanie, “both my parents were Greek, so I guess that was...they were kind of like... but they were also Greek in the 80s. It was way different then. So they were like, well just do it and...because I’m the only person from my high school who came here, they were like, well, it will help you meet people and if nothing else you’ll meet people during rush.” Cara shared a similar sentiment about her family’s involvement with the Greek system, and how that impacted her deciding to become Greek herself, to the point that not

going through rush was never even a consideration. “I came to Mizzou without knowing anybody and my mom and my dad were both Greek and they encouraged it and it wasn’t really something that I ever necessarily pictured myself doing but I never pictured myself not doing it, I guess, but my mom always encouraged it and she was like, you know, when you are in a sorority in college, you will have all these friends and it will be so great and like it won’t even matter if you go a zillion miles away because you can rush.”

Other women mentioned that while they were in fact legacies (women who were the sister or daughter of a sorority member) this fact did not play heavily in to their initial decision to join their particular chapter, although it did provide an appreciated connection and sense of tradition. As Lizzie said, “I ended up joining the one that my grandma was in which has been like awesome but it wasn’t like on purpose.” Alex’s experience as a legacy combines both importance of familial history and connection and the narrative of the rush process leading women to where they are supposed to be:

My mom was an Alpha up in Wisconsin. I never knew that she was in a sorority until like my senior year of high school and she never talked about it or anything like that so it wasn’t a big part of her identity but whenever I came here, I just kind of naturally let recruitment guide me wherever and that was like the one place that I would always like automatically draw my eyes to on the sheets whenever they told us like which houses we were going back to and everything and there was all this symbolic meaning during recruitment which like “oh I could see myself” like “that kind of suits me” or something.

For other women, joining a particular chapter as a legacy was something that had deep symbolic meaning and emotional importance. Kate, whose sister was a junior member of Omega Chi when Kate went through rush, found the connection of being both blood

sisters and sorority sisters hugely meaningful. Even before she started school at Mizzou, Kate had very positive impressions of Omega Chi and a strong desire to join the sorority, a feeling that intensified during recruitment.

Also my older sister is a Omega Chi and so that has been really cool being able to share that with her, because we are not only blood sisters, but sorority sisters. She is a senior and I'm a sophomore, so she is a little older than me, and when I came to visit Mizzou, like when I was deciding where I was going to go, I came and stayed with her in the sorority house and I just thought all of the girls were really nice and, yeah...And going through rush, like, one of the days is called Sisterhood Day and they, like, focus on that, and my sister "walked out to me," which is what they call it, and we both were like in tears.

Devon, despite feeling that she would have found companionship and belonging in any sorority, arrived on campus with the firm intention of joining Pi Omega Pi, given her family's extensive history of membership and involvement with that sorority.

I knew that I wanted to be in Pi Omega Pi because I'm a legacy there... My mom and my aunt and my grandma and my grandma's sister.... It is kind of fun whenever we all get together and do like songs and stuff, but I never was pushed by my grandma or my mom or anything like that.

Her experiences echo those of many other legacies, who rarely felt pushed to join a particular chapter, but often did end up in their mother's or sister's chapter, either out of subtle pressure, or because of an ingrained sense of 'fitting in'. Stephanie, who joined Rho Delta after being cut from her first choice sorority, explained how her mother's membership in Rho Delta related to her eventual experience: "she never said I had to be in Rho Delta or anything, she really didn't care, like that wasn't part of the decision. And

then once I was it ended up being a good thing, because she came for my initiation and was like there to do all that...”

However, being a legacy does not guarantee a potential new member a bid to join a sorority. Lisa, a sporty, outdoorsy member of DTPhi, shared her experience going through rush as a legacy of Phi Kappa, a chapter known for its focus on looks, clothing, and money.

The only reason why I stayed in recruitment was because half the time after going through the first couple days, I was like, “you know how cool it would be to be in my mom’s sorority? Like to be where she is and we can share all those secrets of the sorority and things like that.” And I love the fact that I could have been in my mom’s sorority. And I used to wear Phi Kappa shirts when I was little. And I wore all of her college shirts when I was going to high school and middle school and things, and then when I was getting ready to go off to college she goes “I need all those back. If you get into Phi Kappa you can wear them again. But I can’t let you wear them right now.”

...They have to call, so like every time a legacy gets cut from any house, the recruitment head has to call the legacy chair. Like, so, the most important one of my legacies is my mother, so they had to call...Phi Kappa’s advisor or their recruitment chair has to call my mother and tell her that I have been released from recruitment from their house. She listed off Phi Kappa’s [standards of what their sorority is built on] to them and goes “that’s fine. You can always tell that she doesn’t fit in with the girls. You could have told me that she didn’t fit in with the girls. That her personality didn’t match with the house, and I would’ve been totally fine with that. But you cannot tell me that she did not have all five systems.” Because my mother raised me to make sure that I had those things.

Despite not being offered a bid to Phi Kappa and her mother’s displeasure with her former sorority for cutting her daughter, Lisa expressed her relief and happiness that she became a member of DTPhi, saying “yeah, I wouldn’t have fit in [at Phi Kap], showing

both the importance of the legacy system, as well as the strength of the ‘ending up where you belong’ narrative.

Community, involvement, friendship, and organizational history are some of the main benefits of sorority membership as described by members and sorority leaders, as well as the organizations themselves. As such, it is not surprising that many women discuss these advantages of membership frequently. However, when it comes to the other formally stated benefits of sorority involvement, namely philanthropy, networking, and academics, and history, which are often touted by the organizations themselves, members are less attached to these ideals. For example, despite philanthropy being held up a pillar of the Greek system and sorority life, only one participant mentioned her chapter’s philanthropic involvement as a factor in her decision to join her sorority. For Nicole, “Chi Delta as a whole, one of the most important things to me besides friendship is our philanthropy. My mom had breast cancer, my grandma died from it and I had a couple other family members have it as well, so it touches me very personally. It was very close, if not the number one, reason why I did join Chi Delta, behind the conversations that I had with the girls.”

Networking and job opportunities provided through sorority connections are another feature of sorority involvement that is often formally mentioned in sorority literature, but are rarely mentioned in actuality. In fact, only two women interviewed included potential networking opportunities as a factor in their decision to join a sorority. Cara, who had considered de-activating (quitting) her sorority several times, talked about

remaining a paying, active member of Omega Xi strictly in terms of future practical benefits: “It is not so much that I want to be necessarily tied to this chapter of Chi-O. It is more like the national thing and networking in the future. I know I have heard of a lot of just Omega Xi alumni that are like, yeah, I have met so many people just in my profession that are like “Oh, I am a Chi-O, too.” Samantha offers a less cynical take on the networking angle, saying that her membership in DTPhi “means also networking for me. Because I just met a dad on parent brunch who is, I don’t know what he does. He is some sort of, I don’t even know what you call it. He is in the educational system in Kansas City, but he has a higher position.” For Samantha, who wishes to pursue a career in education, these connections are invaluable to her, and prove an added bonus to the benefits of sorority membership. For members who are tired of sorority life and wish to quit, these connections to other members offer a suitable enticement to stay involved. However, the possibility of future networking and connections to alumnae from other schools is far less salient in reality than in sorority literature.

As with philanthropy and networking, only one member brought the import of her sorority’s history. While sororities have historically provided a way for women to access the benefits higher education offered men on campus, current members did not mention this as a determining factor (Horowitz 1987). Alex, a member of top tier sorority Alpha, a chapter known for intelligent, involved, and classy members, described herself as “all about the history of Alpha” She went on to describe her sorority thusly:

We are the first fraternity technically so it is very, you know, feministic and stuff. We found out sororities are founded by fraternities and men had defined them in the 1870s when they were founded and I always felt like I had a lot to empathize for our founders with the sororities that they had... For me personally, it is a connect between the history of women that I always respected but never realized I respected until I kind of feel into place with my sorority... I am all about the history of Alpha.

In contrast to Alex's focus on history, Nicole's focus on philanthropy, and Cara and Samantha's appreciation of networking benefits, two reasons most often cited by members for joining a sorority centered around advantages of sorority life not discussed in formal literature, namely, the status attached to being Greek on campus, and the status attached to a being a member of a particular (usually upper tier) sorority.

Style and Status

Many women discussed how sorority members (and often fraternity members) were superior to GDIs (God Damned Independents) in dress, style, and popularity. Jen gave the example of a group of girls in her sorority who had a twitter account that devoted a considerable amount of time to bashing non-Greeks on campus.

They always tweet stuff like, the girl sitting in front of class and what she is wearing or the geed with the long board outside that almost ran them over and they always make snarky comments about it, which are actually pretty funny. I don't know, it does have something to do with it for sure.

Jen continued on to say that non-Greeks were indeed considered to dress more poorly and to be less cool and popular than Greeks, saying "I feel like that is the impression, like cargo pants and stuff like that." Adrienne mentioned that lots of girls "just want letters",

reinforcing the social clout attached to being Greek. Historically, this has been a prominent reason for women to join sororities, and the comments made by the women interviewed suggest that social standing continues to be a key concern in crafting a sorority identity (Horowitz 1987).

Kimberly took the notion of status attached to be a sorority member a step further, connecting money and background to sorority involvement. She described her family's view of her sorority involvement as being heavily focused on the perceived status benefits of membership.

Well I think my parents like the idea of me being in a sorority because they saw that the average GPA in a sorority is like a 3.4 or something like that, and that everyone just looks so happy and pretty and like you get to do all these fun activities that you wouldn't get to do if you weren't in a sorority. So I think it automatically gives you a set group of friends, and then off of that you get all these different opportunities that you wouldn't get to have if you weren't in a sorority... obviously if you're in a sorority, then that means that your family usually has enough money to put you in a sorority, so I feel like automatically everyone gets narrowed down some more to a similar upbringing. Not necessarily, but I feel like a lot of the time it does that. Like if you go to a private school then you're automatically a little bit narrowed down, because your parents like believe certain things.

While Kimberly's description of sorority life and status did reference friendship and involvement on campus, her emphasis is on the status necessary to become a sorority member as well as the status attached to being a sorority member.

In addition to the general perception of status attached to being a member of the Greek system, status of being a part of a particular sorority is another motivation many members mentioned for joining their sorority. Status categories include good looks,

popularity, intelligence, and 'classiness', but generally centered around looks and popularity, two categories tightly interwoven with the degree to which members of a sorority adhered to stereotypical sorority looks.

Kate discussed how members of her house, the top tier sorority Omega Chi, were concerned with status, as well as the appearance and popularity based aspect of this status.

I think it is important because people worry about the overall image and I think that, pridefully, people want to be like, "Oh yeah, I'm a member of this sorority and look how pretty all of my sorority sisters are." It just makes them feel better about themselves. That's my take on it. [To be able to say] We're the hottest sorority.

Courtney, also a Omega Chi, and a fifth year senior, discussed the huge boon to Omega Chi's reputation provided by Allison Smith's membership. Smith, a celebrity sister of a famous actor and the wife of a popular athlete, is well known on campus. "[Allison] is talked about. And like I said, she is one of like the nicest girls in the world but you say you're an Omega Chi and everyone goes "Wasn't Allison Smith an Omega Chi?" In addition to having had a celebrity and several beauty queens as members, Courtney discussed the reproduction of status in her sorority, saying:

We just say confident, classy women and that is just a thing that our personal chapter says. It is supposed to be like women of purpose, leadership, scholarship, but for us, basically, like you know, if you are out and about, we kind of hold each other to the standards that you don't want to embarrass anybody at the bar in front you know what I mean because people are going to be saying "Oh, that is Omega Chi. They are all like that.

While confidence and class have more vague descriptions in the University community, hotness and popularity are more easily defined, given strict standards for sorority style and the relatively set position of sororities in the Greek system's informal hierarchy. Several women interviewed, described their membership in top tier houses as a source of pride.

“I was definitely really proud like I was proud. Um, I think it was a status thing because I knew how hard it was to get into Omega Xi.” Chloe, former Omega Xi

I'm showing off that that I'm in a sorority. It was really exciting for me as a sophomore to get a good house like this.” –Maria, Delta Tau Phi (DTPhi)

“Well, the last three houses that wanted me were Pi Omega Pi, Beta and Phi Kap.” [She eventually joined top tier Phi Kappa]- Becca, former Phi Kap

The Evolving Meaning of Membership

Women offer myriad reasons for joining a sorority in general and their chapter in particular, ranging from desire to make connections to desire for popularity and status. However, once a member of a chapter, one persistent dialogue emerges about the evolution of the importance of membership over time. As with other identities and concepts of self, the constructing of a sense of self and belonging is ongoing, and evolves during interactions (Gubrium and Holstein 1999). Sorority women's narratives of the changes in the salience of sorority membership illustrate this clearly. Every women interviewed discussed how the importance of her sorority membership lessened over her

academic career, with freshman (pledges), and sophomores (living in the sorority house) attaching the most meaning to being a sorority member. For example, newer members tended to wear their sorority letters and display sorority items far more frequently than older members. As Samantha says “Yeah, especially when you live in the house – like our whole room was you know, DTPhi stuff because like it was exciting and like when I moved out, I still do have DTPhi stuff but it’s not like everywhere – It’s not like we want it out all over the house. It is kind of like more of a grown up type of thing.” In addition to visual displays of membership and involvement, women’s attitudes about the sorority and its place in their life tend to become more nonchalant over time. According to Jen:

I think it has changed from my freshman to my sophomore year. At the beginning of my freshman year, jumping into such a big school and coming from a small high school it was the way I identified myself with, like if someone asked me what sorority I was in it was really important for me to say which one it was. But now if someone says I’m in a sorority I don’t feel like it is necessary to say which one. Being this year is the first year I’m living in the house and the reputations you think you are is completely flipped when you are actually living in it all the time. So, I mean I identify with it, but the importance of which one it is isn’t as big now.

Cara echoes Jen’s sentiments, talking about how her involvement in Omega Xi gradually transitioned from a joy in to an obligation:

Well, I feel like it has come to mean less and less to me over the years... At this point, it is kind of just something that I am not super involved with anymore but I still have to go to certain events sometimes which ...they are still enjoyable and it is still fun and I still, you know, enjoy, all the people but a lot of times, it seems more like a chore than actually what I got into it for but when I was a freshman and even last year when I was living in the house, I was super involved and it was really fun and it was like sorority all the time and I was really passionate about it but then after moving out and having a little bit of distance, it’s just kind of like a

hassle to get there because I don't always feel inclined to go to things and then I get annoyed when I don't go and get like fined for something but I don't know, I think now it is more of like an obligation that something that is fun.

Samantha concurs with both Jen and Cara, specifically mentioning how her identification with her sorority changed as she moved out of the sorority house and transitioned from a freshman pledge to a senior:

Well as a freshman and sophomore, it meant a lot more than it means to me now like as a senior, I am kind of more like not as close to it anymore because I am not like super involved with like, you know, homecoming, Greek week, just things that I can't go to chapter because I have lab hours like I feel like detached from it so like now it's more about just like, you know, the friends I've made from it and like all my roommates are DTPhi like just having that forever like always being DTPhi like that's what it means to me kind of thing. Like whenever I was a freshman and sophomore, I was more like, you know, these are my sisters, like these are my best friends but like sophomore year was probably like the most important because I lived in the house so it was like I wore DTPhi all the time, you know, it was just like I was so proud of it especially because we like won Greek week and homecoming things.

Courtney describes how she was formerly concerned about being positively associated with Omega Chi both to members and non-members, saying "when you are a new member, like a freshman or sophomore, yes; you are thinking "Oh my gosh. I have to look great. I am wearing my letters. I have to be coordinating. I have to have like the best bag that I own or you know, I have to, because God forbid, what if an older girl sees me and she says I look trashy and then she tells all the other girls."

It's important to consider the various factors at play here- freshmen find their identity more tenuous, and as new members, feel the need to constantly demonstrate that

they fit in to their chapters, both to insiders and outsiders, as Courtney points out.

Sophomore year, this continues, because sophomores are required to live in the sorority house. However, women do not live in the house after this, unless they are officers, so involvement lessens when they live out, and are not exposed to daily life in the sorority house and Greek town. Adrienne offers an illustration of these effects on membership numbers and their evolution over time, supporting the personal statements made by Samantha, Cara, Jen and Courtney.

I think that the younger they are, the more they just want letters and the status thing and you will see that in chapters. Their retention rates are horrible. The amount of people that drop over the years is just insane. Like my senior year, hardly anyone is Greek anymore because they don't want to be painting that kind of status for the first couple of years. They did the frat party thing. They wore those letters. They went to those day parties and people thought that they were cool necessarily and now like I am a senior, I don't feel like paying for that anymore.

In addition to the impact time has on the salience of membership and on a sorority woman's attitude towards her involvement with her chapter, the prestige of the chapter itself has some bearing on the degree to which a woman associates her identity with her sorority. As Diana Kendall points out, in most cases, women from higher tier sororities have more attachments to their sorority identity. Survey data from this study supports Kendall's findings- women who list their sorority membership as important or very important for their identities tend to be members of higher tier houses. These women also tend to associate themselves very closely with sorority ideals/stereotypes attached to their houses: for example: Omega Chi: classy and respectable, still very pretty and polished;

Alpha: intelligent, classy, and dignified. For example, Alex, member of the highly respected top tier house Alpha, describes her sorority identity by saying “I view Alpha as who I am versus something that I am just a part of. I don’t view myself as a sorority girl, but I do view myself as an Alpha.” This contrasts with Stephanie, a highly involved member of Rho Delta, who contrasts her experience at Mizzou with that of friends at Ohio State

I feel like than at Mizzou, where I feel it’s more like “you are a Rho Delta” rather than “I’m in Rho Delta.” Like even the way my friends talk when they come home for break, it’s not like “oh, I’m an Omega Xi at Ohio State” it’s “I’m in Omega Xi.” And here it’s like “you are…” And I feel like it’s more of a defining thing. So I guess I do feel like I’m an Rho Delta because I’m on exec and I associate myself with it, but I guess I wish it was more like “I’m in Rho Delta.” Because I feel like it is only an aspect of my personality.

Being IN a sorority versus being A [member of a] sorority is not a distinction that most women drew in discussing their membership motivations. Those who did attach more significance to their sorority involvement were usually newer underclassmen or members of top tier houses. Membership and the meaning attached to being a member is interrelated to the sense of belonging a woman experiences as a sorority member, as well as a member of her individual chapter. Regardless of the significance membership held for women, most reported joining sororities for similar reasons. These reasons fell in to two broad categories: those officially promoted by the sorority and the Greek system, and those given informal but still extremely relevant value. Formally, nearly every Panhellenic sorority describes itself as valuing friendship, involvement, and sisterhood

and connection. Most women did include these reasons as strong motivations to go through rush and join a sorority. However, two pillars of Greek life that are repeatedly touted but rarely a source of motivation or pride, philanthropy and networking, failed to make a significant impact in the experiences of the women interviewed. In reality, many women talked about the excitement, prestige, and status that being a part of a sorority provided them, an experience that is tightly interlinked with the strong presence of appearance and financial standards for sorority members, as well as the makeup of the University itself.

Conclusion

While sorority women's discussions of their motivations in joining and remaining members of their sororities were rarely explicitly connected to appearance, the importance of appearance did present an underlying motivation for membership. First, women used belonging to a sorority as a way to shape their identities. By distinguishing themselves from "geeds" and other students perceived to be uncool and/or uninvolved, sorority members forge an identity that is predicated both on doing and on not doing. Joining a group known for involvement and exclusion based on consumption and appearance provides many women with a sense of pride connected tightly to their identity as someone who belongs to a sorority chapter. Whether their particular chapter is a source of pride, such as Kate, who acknowledges that many women are excited if they are in "the hottest house", or Kimberly, who agreed with her family that joining any sorority would mean that she spent time with the "right kind of people", sorority

membership exerts a substantial influence on identity for women. Women's narratives of their behavior and experiences illustrate this, as member after member spoke of the influence sorority involvement had on their actions, appearance, and self-presentation.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

The meaning of appearance in influencing organizational identity in sorority members centers around four main themes: belonging, consumption, choreography of impression management, and the creation of distinctions. The interplay between these four themes allows sorority women to construct and maintain not only a sense of identity, but also a sense of belonging as members of their chapters. None of these themes operates in isolation; rather, in concert with other factors, sorority women negotiate belonging through appearance, consumption, and actions. Although the choices of clothing, makeup, and hairstyles in college sorority women may seem to be a mundane expression of fashion or an indication of conformity to larger trends, in actuality, these choices serve as essential tools for sorority women to shape their identities as individual members of a larger group, and to demonstrate a sense of belonging for those within and outside of their sororities. Additionally, these choices illustrate the intersection of gender, class, appearance, and impression management in the sorority system.

Appearance as an Indicator of Belonging

Sorority women's carefully crafted appearances function as a key indicator of and tool for belonging. Far from being a representation of mindless conformity, the use of specific styles and brands serves to ensure that women are fully integrated to their organizations, or not, as the cases of nonconformity illustrate. By wearing similar styles of clothing, hair, and makeup, sorority women express the unity and cohesion of their

organization (Freitas et al, 1997, Kaiser 1993, Pratt & Rafaeli 1997, Swain 2002). By adhering to strictures of appearances that are widely accepted among women in the Greek community during sorority recruitment, prior to joining a chapter, women signal their ability to meet the ideals of sorority chapters, which is an important theme in both academic and non-academic accounts of sorority life (Robbins 2005). Additionally, this serves to communicate their desire and willingness to comply with the ideals and chosen image of their organization as a whole (Kendall 2002). By choosing to straighten their hair during the humid August days of rush, purchasing expensive and preppy brands of clothing such as Lily Pulitzer, and paying close attention to their makeup and accessories, potential new members use their appearances to display their desire for inclusion in a sorority. This work also allows current members to see that a potential new member would be a positive representation of her sorority. A rushee's appearance illustrates not only the extent to which she is willing and able to fit a sorority's image, but also the extent of to which she will commit to the sorority itself. According to one member of an upper tier sorority, "It is not what the girl looks like but how the girl is put together is part of taken into account because it shows in a lot of people's eyes how dedicated they are to being in a sorority."

Once in a sorority, women use their appearances to display and showcase their organizational affiliation. By wearing styles coded as "Greek", such as leggings, Nike running shorts, heavy makeup to class, dresses and heels at social events, as well as official sorority merchandise bearing sorority letters, women are able to represent their

sorority affiliation to outsiders and prove their belonging to other members. Courtney shows the dual functions of appearance and belonging, describing her focus on appearance during her freshman and sophomore years by saying “Oh my gosh. I have to look great. I am wearing my letters. I have to be coordinating. I have to have like the best bag that I own or you know, I have to, because God forbid, what if an older girl sees me and she says I look trashy and then she tells all the other girls.” By using meticulously crafted appearance to communicate pride in membership and ability to convey a positive image for the sorority, Courtney and other members work to display the importance of belonging in their chapters. Differing styles of appearance allow current sorority members to visibly indicate their belonging to a particular chapter by adhering to the chapter’s individual image, such as the “sporty” DTPhi, the “classy” Alpha, the “beauty queen” Omega Chi, or the “money” of Phi Kap.

Appearance also serves as a form of gatekeeping in determining who will be given the opportunity to belong to a sorority, and once a member, who will fully be able to belong. During recruitment, overweight or less attractive members are frequently cut from houses, often without members being able to vote, such as in Chloe’s chapter, Omega Xi. While sorority women avoided making overtly negative comments about Potential New Members’ appearances, women repeatedly indicated that belonging was predicated on looks, stating that “everyone just knows” that an conventionally unattractive or overweight member “wouldn’t be a good fit” for a chapter concerned with appearance. Once in a sorority, appearance still serves as crucial component of

belonging. For women who are able to join chapters that prize attractiveness as legacies, they frequently find themselves distanced from their sisters at social events, lest they bring down the overall reputation of the organization. Also, less attractive women are regularly presumed to be legacies, who didn't really fit in with the chapter as a whole. Another way in which appearance is used to convey an underlying lack of belonging to unattractive members is the social control that proscribes overt discussion of those who are unable to fit the desired mold. For example, women frequently mentioned that heavier women in their chapters needed to purchase rush clothing from stores other than those worn by the chapter as a whole. However, this was never addressed publicly, nor was this mentioned as a reason to seek out a style that could fit all women. Stephanie suggested that women in her chapter who need to buy shorts from a store other than J. Crew purposely "kept it to themselves" so as not to draw attention to their differing appearance and further emphasize the extent to which they did not fully fit in to their organization. When women did discuss women with non-ideal appearances belonging to the Greek system, their narratives focused on these women as members of chapters known for being unattractive. This allowed women in upper tier chapters to present a veneer of acceptance and tolerance for diversity and non-conformity, while allowing women in lower tier chapters to salvage dignity by claiming a less shallow focus. However, both discourses served to underscore the overall necessity of adhering to ideal appearance in the sorority system by bracketing those who did not fit in as acceptable only as members under certain conditions. The importance of adhering to a standardized sorority appearance is

also predicated on women's commitment to femininity, illustrating the sorority system's focus on traditional interpretations of feminine appearance (Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006, Rolnik, Engeln Maddox, and Miller 2010).

Consumption as a Requirement of Involvement

The importance of consumption as a factor of appearance in sorority women highlights the subtle, underlying importance of financial status in the sorority system. To begin with, being involved in a sorority costs money, from the upfront charge for participating in rush, to membership dues and house fees. More importantly, money assumes a key role in determining a sorority member's belonging via her ability to participate in consumption rituals, most of which center around appearance. The salience of consumption in maintaining an acceptable appearance shows in many ways. First, the styles and brands that are consistently referred to as showing sorority membership are generally costly. The casual clothing styles considered appropriate for sorority women to wear to class require women (or their families) to spend substantial amounts of money to ensure that they fit in. For example, Sperry Top Sider boat shoes cost upwards of \$70, as do trendy Nike and Reebok running shoes. Vineyard Vines and North Face fleece jackets range from \$100-200, and True Religion jeans can cost up to \$300. Regular clothing is not the only category of sorority appearance that requires the ability to consume extensively. Sorority events often require members to purchase a special t-shirt in order to attend. Although these shirts rarely cost more than \$20, the events that require them

are frequent, sometimes as many as twenty per year. If a member chooses not to attend a sorority event, she is usually fined, regardless of her reasons.

Sorority life makes use of consumption rituals as requirements for belonging as well. The ability to maintain an idealized appearance includes tanning, getting manicures, and shopping for clothes, makeup, and accessories, all of which become social events and occasions for bonding among sorority women. For those unable to consume beauty products or brand name styles, belonging in their sorority is limited. In this case, the interplay between consumption, appearance, and belonging is especially evident, as the ability to present the appearance necessary for full belonging is predicated on means of consumption. Additionally, the ability to spend money consuming drinks and dinners at expensive and trendy bars and restaurants allows women to forge bonds as well as display the image of their sororities as stylish, trendy, and popular. Consumption not only serves to precipitate belonging during activities, as described by Stephanie Pugh, but more importantly, to allow sorority women to create a desired appearance for day to day interactions with others (2009).

One event that highlights the underlying importance of financial status via consumption is Mom's Weekend. An annual event for every sorority chapter, this seemingly casual and fun social occasion emphasizes the importance of family background and financial background. For Becca, the one working/lower middle class woman interviewed the focus of Phi Kap's Mom's Weekend on purchasing expensive designer brands and taking trips to local wineries served to exclude both her and her

mother from her sorority experience. Contrarily, Kimberly's breezy accounting of how her parents wanted her to join a sorority so that she would be surrounded by "the right kind of people" emphasizes the connection between family financial background, consumption, and belonging. As Diana Kendall points out, women from upper class backgrounds place a great deal of importance on their daughters continuing their legacy as sorority members, both as an illustration of social standing and an assurance that young women fit ideal images of femininity (2002). For the women in this sample, family background presented an underlying indication of the importance of class in sorority life. Fully half of the women interviewed were the daughters and or sisters of sorority women, with some, such as Pi Omega Pi Devon, being the granddaughter, daughter, and niece of alumnae of her exclusive sorority.

Much like the necessity of fitting a certain standard of appearance, the necessity of financial status and consumption for belonging to a sorority is usually not addressed. Other than the few women who were paying for their sorority cost themselves, including Becca, who had to leave Phi Kappa because of the prohibitive direct and indirect costs of membership, women ignored the importance of financial status and consumption for belonging. By mentioning the one or two members of their chapters who were paying their own way, women created a narrative of egalitarianism. Additionally, women often drew comparisons with the sororities considered wealthy, framing their sororities as locations where money was irrelevant. As Jenny Stuber found in her study of upper and lower middle class college students, this discourse allows women to acknowledge

financial status while at the same time ignoring and denying its importance (2006).

However, as Becca's detailed accounts of the importance of consumption for maintaining belonging in Phi Kappa shows, this narrative is largely false. Consumption, and the appearance characteristics it allows sorority women to present, is a crucial component of the sorority experience.

Appearance and Impression Management

Beyond using appearance to show individual belonging to a sorority, sororities craft and display carefully choreographed organizational appearances as a part of detailed impression management. The accounts of rush from the four members of Omega Tau Chi interviewed present a clear illustration of how sorority women use a practiced impression management to convey their desired image. Known as the "beauty queen" house on campus, members of Omega Chi worked as a unit to ensure that they maintained their sorority's high ranking and reputation as attractive, classy women. While many sorority members mentioned that the most attractive members of their chapters were the first to greet potential new members during rush, Omega Chi took the process a step further, matching women with the same hair color, build, and overall appearance during the staged "walk out" of rush. Additionally, former rush chair Courtney confided that her chapter used celebrity Allison Smith prominently during rush in order to ensure that her presence showcased Omega Chi's image. Other Omega Chis talked about how their chapter insisted that any signs of a "deviant" appearance that didn't meet the sorority standard, such as facial piercings and tattoos were hidden. Members of all sororities went

tanning, got their nails done, lined up to show their outfits to seniors for approval and got their hair done before meeting potential new members, all in service of presenting their desired organizational appearance.

Outside of rush, sorority women used appearance and actions as methods of conveying their organizational identity. Women talked about the importance of representing their houses by making sure they looked “clean” and “classy” while wearing their sorority letters, lest someone see them as think “Oh, she looks like a skank, so Omega Chis must be”, as Kate put it. Actions also were considered an importance aspect of crafting a positive organizational image. Women used examples from both their sororities and other chapters to highlight the importance of presenting a good impression of their chapters. Stephanie spoke of how she worked hard to counteract Rho Delta’s reputation of crazy party girls after gossip spread in Greek town surrounding a Rho Delta who got drunk and urinated publicly at an official sorority event. She also used highly disapproving terms in speaking of her roommate’s best friend, who spoke of the large amount of casual sex she engaged in while wearing her Pi Omega Pi letters, actions which Stephanie considered unbecoming and a negative reflection of Pi Omega Pi as a whole.

Sorority members also make use of extensive control to ensure that members’ appearances meet the sorority’s desired image. Contrary to widespread belief that sorority women were outspoken in their direct criticism of each other, women reported the prevalence of subtle social control. In fact, many women didn’t even consider the

practices of their sorority to be pressuring at all. However, the expectation that one have a work out buddy to exercise with after eating a special dinner, as Alex reported in Alpha, or the use of going to the gym as a bonding ritual, as Courtney talked about in Omega Chi, and the time women spent making over a tomboyish DTPhi sister clearly served this purpose. The fact that women didn't recognize this as overt pressure to maintain a suitable appearance suggests that sorority women have deeply and unconsciously internalized ideals of appearance, either before or after they joined their sororities. The one woman who DID talk about social control of appearance in her sorority, Stephanie, felt that she was especially cognizant of this due to her history of disordered eating. Again, this confirms and expands on previous research that shows sorority women as being highly concerned with appearance as members of their organizations (Gillen and Leftkowitz 2006, Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox and Miller 2010, Ryan 2009).

Forging Identity Distinctions via Appearance

Finally, sorority women use appearance as a method of crafting identity distinctions. Appearance serves to create distinctions between sorority women and non-Greeks (GDIs), as well as between members of different sororities. Interestingly, sorority women report finding satisfaction and meaning in being a member of a sorority in general as well as of their sorority in particular. The use of sorority coded appearance characteristics such as merchandise with letters and other clothing styles provides women with a sense of identity, belonging, and place on the huge university campus. Women speak of a sorority identity crafted via "not doing" which creates a sense of self via

campus involvement and attention to appearance. While Adrienne Mullaney writes of groups reclaiming and salvaging stigmatized identities using this tactic, sorority women use this when negotiating their privileged identity as attractive sorority women (2006).

More frequently, sorority women use appearance as a tool to create distinctions between their sororities and others on campus. This is usually, but not always accomplished by comparing sororities with another that is portrayed negatively. For example, women were quick to acknowledge that members of Pi Omega Pi and Gamma Sigma Beta were extremely attractive, but nearly always responded that their sorority was superior in appearance based on the view of Pi Omega Pis and Gamma Sigs as “slutty”, “trashy”, “skanky”, and “cheap”. Beta Lizzie laughingly related how she and her sisters, who were pretty, but not “flashy pretty”, walked behind a Pi Omega Pi wearing extremely revealing shorts to a casual Greek Week event. Women made use of intra-sorority system distinctions in touting their chapters’ overall attractiveness. By talking about the “fat girls” of Delta Mu, or the diverse array of women in AMu, albeit it in a non-insulting fashion, women drew distinctions that put their chapters in a positive light regarding the sorority’s appearance as a whole. However, women in chapters widely considered unattractive as a whole also used this to create a positive sorority identity based on this distinction. A Mus Victoria and Adrienne spoke happily about the diversity of women in their chapter, claiming to take pride in the lack of shallowness they felt this displayed. Regardless of whether or not a chapter’s appearance as perceived positively or

negatively, sorority women used appearance to shape their collective identity by creating distinctions that allowed them to frame their organizations in flattering terms.

Overall, sorority women used their appearances to serve multiple purposes and achieve a diverse array of goals. Through carefully selecting clothing, makeup, hairstyles, and accessories, sorority women forge organizational identities as members of the Greek system in general and their individual chapters in particular. Women negotiated their physical appearances to facilitate and display belonging as sorority members, as well as to draw identity distinctions that allowed them to frame their sorority identities positively. Additionally, appearance allowed women to craft and maintain a cohesive and desired organizational image. The salience of importance in sorority life also illustrates the underlying necessity of consumption and class, as well as hegemonic femininity for women in the Greek system. However, despite the multifaceted importance that physical appearance holds for sorority women, this significance is rarely acknowledged or addressed directly. Rather, women speak of appearance standards as a given, mentioning them in coded terms, or conceding their importance circuitously. This illustrates the deeply ingrained importance appearance holds in sorority life, as well as the attendant salience of the classed and gendered standards maintained by sorority women. The extent to which sorority women construct a sense of belonging using appearance, consumption, self-presentation, and membership itself is complex, interwoven, and often invisible both to outsiders and the women themselves. This interplay exists on many levels, and the resultant sense of belonging that is so salient for collegiate sorority members is not

constructed on any single front, but rather is crafted through ongoing and multifaceted work.

MATERIALS APPENDIX

Interview Prompts

Tell me a little about yourself- how do you define yourself as a person?

Tell me about what being in your sorority means to you.

What was your rush experience like?

As a potential new member?

As a member?

Do you think your sorority does rush differently than other sororities on campus?

How does appearance play in to the rush experience?

What was your style like before you joined your sorority? Did things change?

What makes someone a good sorority sister?

What makes your sorority different than other sororities?

How can you tell someone is a member of your sorority?

Are there any women in your sorority who don't fit in? How so?

How do you think your sorority 'ranks' compared to others on campus?

Is beauty/appearance something that is necessary to be a member of your sorority? How do you feel about that?

Is weight important for members of your sorority?

Does financial background impact participation in your sorority?

How do you think others perceive your sorority? Do you agree with that?

Do you want people to know you are a member of your sorority?

If no, why not?

If yes, how do you do that?

When was a time your sorority as a whole looked the best? Looked the worst?

Do you think beauty matters in society? How about on the Mizzou campus?

How do you feel about women who are conventionally unattractive?

Walk me through getting ready to go to class versus going out. What preparations do you engage in?

Demographic Questionnaire

- 1) What is your age? _____ years
- 2) What year are you in school? (freshman, sophomore, etc.) _____
- 3) What sorority are you in?
- 4) Where do you live (dorm, sorority house, off-campus, etc)? _____
- 5) For how many years have you been a member of your sorority? _____
- 6) What is your family's approximate annual income?
 - Less than \$25,000 _____
 - \$25,001- \$50,000 _____
 - \$50,001- \$74,499 _____
 - \$75,000- \$99,999 _____
 - \$100,000 or above _____
 - I don't know _____
- 7) How would you describe your family's social class?
 - Poor _____
 - Working Class _____
 - Lower-Middle Class _____
 - Middle Class _____
 - Upper Middle Class _____
 - Upper Class _____

8) How would you describe the social class of most of the other members of your sorority?

Poor ____

Working Class ____

Lower-Middle Class ____

Middle Class ____

Upper Middle Class ____

Upper Class ____

9) How do you define your Race/ Ethnicity?

White ____

Black ____

Hispanic/ Latina ____

Asian ____

Other (please write in) ____

Beauty and Appearance Metrics

10) What (numerical) size clothing do you normally wear? _____

11) How many minutes a day do you spend on your appearance (selecting clothes, doing hair, makeup, tanning, etc.)? _____

12) On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most attractive, how attractive do you find yourself? _____

13) On the same scale, how attractive do you think others find you? _____

14) In your opinion, on a scale of 1-10, how attractive is your sorority as a whole? _____

- 15) On the same scale, how attractive do you think others find your sorority as a whole? _____
- 16) How important of a membership characteristic is appearance for your sorority?
- Very important _____
 - Important _____
 - Neither important nor unimportant _____
 - Unimportant _____
 - Very unimportant _____
- 17) How important of a factor is your appearance in regards to your identity?
- Very important _____
 - Important _____
 - Neither important nor unimportant _____
 - Unimportant _____
 - Very unimportant _____
- 18) Describe the ideal beautiful woman in a few sentences.
- 19) How important is your sorority membership in regards to your identity?
- Very important _____
 - Important _____
 - Neither important nor unimportant _____
 - Unimportant _____
 - Very unimportant _____

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