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Exploring How Popular Media Affects the Motivations and Hesitations of Women Who Go Through Sorority Recruitment at the University of Southern Mississippi

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Exploring How Popular Media Affects the Motivations and Hesitations of Women Who
Go Through Sorority Recruitment at the University of Southern Mississippi

by

Whitley W. Howell

A Thesis
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ABSTRACT

Fraternity and sorority life is an important part of many college students' experiences. Sororities provide college women with many opportunities for leadership, service, academics, and growth. Even though sororities have many benefits, they often have negative connotations in popular and social media. Often, these negative stereotypes affect people's perception of sororities, and many women have hesitations about joining a sorority because of the way sororities are portrayed.

Sorority women express concern with the media's negative representation of Greek life. The negative connotations affect how people see the sororities. Recruitment of new women into the chapters is an important part of sorority life. Exploring how popular media affects the motivations and hesitations of women who go through sorority recruitment at the University of Southern Mississippi will help the sororities grow in the future and work on positively portraying themselves on social media.

Current sorority women at USM were interviewed to learn about their hesitations and motivations to go through recruitment. Fifteen women were interviewed. Friendships, opportunities, and involvement were some of their motivations. The hesitations ranged from how people viewed them, whether they would fit in, negative stereotypes associated with them, and more. They also weighed in on how sororities can work towards a positive image on social media. Only one out of the fifteen women suggested that sororities were represented positively in the media, and the other fourteen women thought they were represented negatively. They all wanted sororities to be shown in the positive way that they see them.

Keywords: higher education, Greek life, fraternity and sorority life, recruitment, media

DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my family, especially my mom, who always supports, encourages, and loves me in whatever I do. I would also like to dedicate my thesis to many lifelong friends that USM has brought me. I would like to say a special thank you to the ones who showed me the value of sorority life and encouraged me through the process of joining one. My sorority has enhanced my college experience and life, and for that, I am forever grateful.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
COB	Continuous Open Bidding
CPC	College Panhellenic Council
GPA	Grade Point Average
USM	The University of Southern Mississippi

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Greek life is the term used to describe the community of students who are members of fraternities and sororities in college. Greek life is also referred to as Fraternity and Sorority Life. Fraternity members are historically men, and sorority members are historically female. Through these organizations, students develop leadership skills, serve the community, raise awareness for philanthropies, and nurture lasting friendships. Sororities are national organizations, and they can establish individual chapters of the sorority on college campuses. Sororities host meetings to fulfill the obligations and goals laid out by the chapter and the national board. They also host sisterhood and social events to bond the chapter. Each sorority has its own values, traditions, rituals, mascots, etc. This makes each sorority unique and special to the members who join.

In order for sororities to expand their chapters, they hold events to recruit new members. College councils have a week called recruitment week, informally known as rush, to allow potential new members to visit the different sorority chapters on their campus. During this week, the sororities share their chapters' values, philanthropies, and sisterhood with the potential new members in hopes of gaining new members. After each day of recruitment, the chapters make a list of women they would like to come back to their chapter and get to know more. Potential new members, the ones going through recruitment looking to join a sorority, also make a list of who they would like to go back and visit. From here, a recruitment specialist is hired by the university to help in matching the chapters and women. She/he along with a special computer system for sorority recruitment analyze the lists and pair which women will go back and visit which

sororities the next day. This process continues through the last day of recruitment. The recruitment week concludes with bid day, where the potential new members open their bid cards. The bid cards are the official invitations to join a sorority (Recruitment at Southern Miss, n.d.).

There are multiple ways for women to join a sorority. The main way is to participate in primary recruitment, where all chapters are eligible to participate. This is the recruitment week outlined in the above paragraph. It typically occurs in the fall, but each college could hold this week at different times. Primary recruitment is typically a more stressful week for the chapters and the women because it is a formal process with many rules to be followed. More potential new members participate in primary recruitment; therefore, it is an organized and structured process to meet each chapter. Women can also join sororities through a process called continuous open bidding (COB). COB can occur at multiple points in the year when the chapter is eligible to give out bids. The ability for a chapter to participate in the COB process depends on their membership numbers and rules by national boards and the university the chapter is at (Recruitment at Southern Miss, n.d.). COB is a more relaxed process for women to learn about each sorority and join a chapter. There are benefits to each process, but the end result of joining a sorority is exciting for the women going through recruitment.

Sorority life at the University of Southern Mississippi provides many opportunities for the women who go through recruitment and join. The women make connections and friendships that are beneficial during undergraduate years and post-graduation. Sororities strive to maintain and surpass GPA requirements. It allows the women to hold leadership positions and develop skills, such as budgeting a bank account

and managing a group of different personalities, that will be useful for future jobs.

Sorority life also allows community service opportunities and a way to relax and have fun at college (Aleman, 2002).

Sorority life at USM is a vital part of many women's college experiences. Because Southern Miss wants to grow the university and sorority life, a study on motivations to join Greek life could be beneficial in recruiting women to join. If the university understands what motivates women to go through recruitment, they can better market sorority life to promote it to future women.

Many women in the study were hesitant to join a sorority because of the way popular media and society often portray it. The participants saw hazing, rejection, stereotypes, and more on social media. They also saw women portrayed as perfect or portrayed in unrealistic ways that did not represent their personalities or values. The women were worried how others might view them as sorority women because of the negative connotations in the media. They did not want to be thought of as partiers or anything else that did not align with their personal values. Many of the hesitations could be traced back to how sororities are represented in movies and social media. Knowing how much this affects the decision to go through recruitment will also help in understanding the motivations to rush.

With many negative connotations associated with sorority life, many women are hesitant to go through recruitment. The news, movies, and social media often highlight a limited view of sororities, often the areas associated with drinking, hazing, and partying. Yet, many sorority women do not associate their experience with the negative stereotypes often reflected in the media. The world often views sororities through the negative lens of

popular media; however, USM sorority women find that the motivations and benefits outweigh their hesitations to go through recruitment and join a sorority. By discussing the motivations and hesitations of one's decision to seek out Greek life, students and leaders can see how popular media affects recruitment and membership at USM.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Sororities

Sororities were not always social organizations with Greek letters attached to their names. The oldest sororities were founded as literary organizations and secret societies. In the late 1800s, sororities adopted Greek letters and began to model themselves after men's fraternities. As sororities progressed, many adapted and focused on academics, which resulted in some sororities being founded for specific majors. Some were founded based on religion. From a variety of backgrounds, social sororities were created (Aleman & Renn, 2002). In 1902, the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) was formed. Their purpose is to assist their member college and alumni chapters to cooperate with colleges and support interfraternal relationships (Mission, Vision and Purpose). When sororities were first started, they were associated with competition, exclusion, legacy, and privilege. Sorority characteristics changed with women's progression in society, and now they strive to strengthen leadership, communication, networks, and fellowship (Aleman & Renn, 2002). NPC is "committed to relationships built on trust through transparency, accountability and mutual respect. Innovation and our core values of friendship, leadership, service, knowledge, integrity and community guide us in fulfilling our mission" (Mission, Vision and Purpose, n.d., para 4).

Sororities at the University of Southern Mississippi

Fraternity and Sorority Life began in 1934 at State Teachers College, now the University of Southern Mississippi. Seven men from the college started the first social fraternity, and in 1937, Zeta Sigma became USM's first national fraternity. At that time, five sororities were added on campus, and Sigma Sigma Sigma became the first national

sorority at USM. In 1937, the College Panhellenic Council (CPC) was formed to promote unity between the sororities on campus. President Dr. R.C. Cook wanted to expand Greek life. During his term from 1945-1954, Chi Omega, Kappa Delta, Phi Mu, and Delta Delta Delta were established. Pi Beta Phi, Delta Gamma, Alpha Delta Pi, and Alpha Chi Omega are the other four national sororities that were represented at USM (*The Drawl*, 2002). Today, about 19% of students on the Hattiesburg campus of USM are involved in Fraternity and Sorority Life (Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, n.d.).

Fraternity and Sorority Life in Research

Fouts (2010) conducted a quantitative study focused on why students were not considering going through sorority and fraternity recruitment. Media and technology, as well as other forms of communication, have an impact on Greek life's image. The study shows that family, friends, and media influenced one's decision to go through recruitment, and personalized interactions with members already in fraternity and sorority life made a difference. The reasons why students did not want to join Greek life included the following: stereotypes due to television and movies, non-affiliated family and friends view on Greek life, lack of encouragement, time commitment, lack of perceived benefits, financial obligations, and view of partying. Media, television, and movies are mentioned in this article, including the data that 57% of students derive their opinions of Greek life based on media (Fouts, 2010).

Sororities in Social Media

Social media has an impact on how consumers view themselves and others. A person is allowed to control the content they post and view on social media, which could positively or negatively affect a person's view of a person or organization. Davis (2018)

looked at two pages on Instagram, a platform with more than 800 million users, that show the life of a college student. Many incoming and current students follow these college Instagram pages. Through the pictures, captions, and comments, a person's view of college could be altered. Many of the pictures do not directly refer to fraternity and sorority life, but the comments and background of pictures indirectly point towards Greek life (Davis 2018).

Osberg et al. (2012) examined the association between freshman college drinking and exposure to movies with alcohol. The participants completed several assessments, and a positive correlation was found between students who watched movies with alcohol and students who consumed alcohol. Thus, movies that promote the drinking of alcohol affects the decision of freshman college students to take part in the drinking. If movies can influence this aspect of college, movies could also impact the decision to go through sorority recruitment. From this, one's decision to rush Greek life could be impacted by how Greek life is portrayed in these movies (Osberg et al., 2012).

Taylor and McArdle (2018) looked at the fraternities' and sororities' use of Twitter, the information released, whether Tweets were positive or negative, and the format of the Tweet. From the data, they concluded that fraternities and sororities do use Twitter, but Greek life uses it more for personal use rather than highlighting the positives of their organization. Ninety-eight percent of sororities have an active Twitter account, and they use social media platforms to brand themselves. This study shows that sororities' social media focuses on internal operations and relaying the news to alumni; instead, they should use it to portray the positives sororities have to offer. Not showing the positive influences sororities have might cause women to be apprehensive because

they have not seen the benefits of everyday sorority activities and relationships. By showing the positives and taking a stand against the negatives, sororities can use social media to portray themselves in a more positive way to society (Taylor & McArdle, 2018).

Fraternities are often shown negatively in the media, and Taylor et al. (2018) categorized news articles as positive, neutral, or negative by focusing on the words and names used in the articles. The researchers looked to see if the university or fraternity itself released a statement about the fraternity events. They found that only thirty-six percent of the articles included a statement from the fraternities. Because news reporters are not contacting fraternities, the fraternities are only reported about when negative behavior occurs. This article shows that the media relies more on what they hear and what the university states rather than listening to members of the Greek community. Therefore, the media usually reports on the negatives. This article also shows that fraternities and sororities should do a better job reaching out to the media to cover the many positive events and benefits of Greek life (Taylor et al., 2018).

Trifiro (2017) researches the stereotypes that fraternities and sororities have in movies, social media, television shows, and news. Because they are often portrayed negatively, non-affiliated students have negative views of Greek life; therefore, fraternities and sororities must try to overcome the media. The Cultivation Theory was used to give evidence of how media affects the perception of life. The researcher collected data through interviews in a qualitative study and found that the media negatively influences the views on Greek life. The research results reflected that media has an impact on Greek life (Trifiro, 2017).

Purpose

This thesis project is significant in advancing the College Panhellenic Council of Fraternity and Sorority Life at the University of Southern Mississippi. The university should constantly be growing and engaging more students. USM could further develop and recruit students to Fraternity and Sorority Life. It is an important part of student involvement. Most students in sorority life are leaders in many organizations outside of their chapter, and they are more willing to give back to the university as alumni.

The goal of this project is to produce results that might influence the way USM portrays sorority life to future women. Knowing the motivations behind why women choose to go through recruitment, specifically at Southern Miss, will help the leaders when encouraging people to rush. If it is found that popular media and movies play a role in deciding whether a person should rush or not, sorority life will know this and can overcome those stereotypes by how they conduct their social media and talk to future members.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Participants

Qualitative data was collected for this study by conducting interviews in the fall of 2020. The participants for the study included fifteen women who are a part of the College Panhellenic Council at USM. The College Panhellenic Council at USM includes Delta Delta Delta, Chi Omega, Alpha Chi Omega, Kappa Delta, Delta Gamma, Phi Mu, Alpha Delta Pi, and Pi Beta Phi. One underclassman and one upperclassman from each CPC sorority participated in the study. Two freshmen, six sophomores, five juniors, and two seniors were interviewed. The women joined their chapters through different recruitment processes. Thirteen women participated in primary recruitment during the fall of their first year at USM; one of the thirteen women was a transfer student with the rest being freshmen. One of the thirteen women went through primary recruitment during the fall of her second year on campus. Two participants went through continuous open bidding in the spring to join their sororities.

The sorority women volunteered to participate in the research. An email was sent to each of the chapters' presidents, asking the presidents to inform the chapter members about the study. The presidents asked the members if anyone would be interested in participating. If they were willing to be interviewed, the researcher received their contact information and reached out to them. From there, the researcher and interviewee set a time to interview. The qualitative data was collected through interviews through Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at USM approved this process before data collection.

Procedure

To begin, an email asking for participants was sent to all the 2020 CPC sorority presidents. The email was sent in September 2020, and responses were received in the weeks that followed. Women interested in participating were then contacted by the researcher. Together, they scheduled a Zoom interview. The participants were emailed the Zoom link to join the interview, and they were emailed an online consent form, granting permission to the researcher to conduct the study. After completing the consent form, the researcher interviewed the participant. A series of questions were then asked. The first several questions provided the researcher with data about the woman's year in college, the affiliated sorority, and time of recruitment. The following questions were open-ended questions to allow the participant to share their motivations, hesitations, stories, and experiences that surrounded their recruitment process. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to use in the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data was collected via interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed so that the researcher could analyze the information and find common or uncommon themes and trends. After studying the interviews, the researcher evaluated responses to be used to interpret the results of the study. The participants were randomly assigned a number between one and fifteen to anonymize their responses to protect their identity. The same anonymization was done for the sororities by assigning them a number one through eight.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Motivations to go Through Sorority Recruitment

The participants began by answering a few demographic questions. Then, they continued the discussion by talking about their motivation for going through sorority recruitment. All of the interviewees stated one of their driving forces to join a sorority could be traced back to friendships. Other common themes of why each woman wanted to go through recruitment were connections, accountability, involvement, and opportunities. Participant 10 said, “I really wanted to make connections, and I think as a transfer student that is something I really worried about. I felt like recruitment was the best way for me to get plugged-in quickly.” Out-of-state residents wanted to join to make friends and become acclimated to a new state. Several women were influenced to join by their friends who were already in sororities at USM and other colleges. One participant was encouraged by family members who were involved in sorority life. Participant 2 stated, “My sister was in a sorority at the time at LSU (Louisiana State University), and I saw the great friends she had and all the cool opportunities she got to be a part of.” One woman decided to go through recruitment because many people in her small town did; “In my community, you just go Greek, so I went Greek,” claimed Participant 11.

The interviewees were asked to discuss their motivations to join and what they wanted to gain from the experience. Friendships were again a common theme. Participant 8 said, “I had a lot of friends from high school (in a sorority) and saw the friends they had made. I wanted that too. When the newness wore off, sorority broadened my perspective and holds me accountable. I would be here for more than just school.”

Like Participant 8, many saw sorority as an opportunity to get involved, gain leadership skills, give back through community service or philanthropy, and be a part of something bigger than themselves. Participant 3 stated, “I wanted to be a part of something that was bigger than myself and find an organization where the people involved in it constantly inspires me to be the best version of myself.” Meaningful connections, support systems, values, future jobs, and learning to balance life and school were also mentioned. Participant 9 mentioned, “I wanted an immediate way to get closer friends, but ... I also thought that if I go through recruitment and I have Greek letters attached to my name, that one day going to a job ... they might have that connection.” Participant 14 had many of the motivations talked through above including, “I want people to hold me accountable. I want to find like lifelong friendships you see on TV and stuff and to give me a sense of leadership, which is what I really wanted out of a sorority, people to push me to be the best version of myself.”

Hesitations of Going Through Sorority Recruitment

Along with many motivations to join a sorority, there are also hesitations. Three of the fifteen women did not report hesitations. Participant 9 claimed, “I was not concerned about it because I knew that if I did not like it, then I was not going to do it.”

The other twelve women reported having hesitations, each being slightly different. Many of the women’s hesitations came from being the first in their families to go through recruitment, not knowing what to expect during the recruitment process, and being overall nervous because it is a new experience. The interviewees that went through recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic were also nervous about Zoom and technology working. Participant 2 asked herself, “Will I find those people, and will I find

the one that I really like?” Participant 6 stated, “The reason why I did not go through formal (recruitment) was because I was scared of rejection.” Participant 6 went through a recruitment process called continuous open bidding in the spring to join her chapter. Participant 11 was worried about hazing, but after she joined her chapter, those worries went away because she realized there was no hazing at all. Participant 12 shared her hesitations of recruitment because of her sexuality. She had heard she needed to hide it and not to tell anyone because chapters would not accept her. Participant 13 was hesitant because of the color of her skin and worried she would not fit in. Both Participant 12 and Participant 13 quickly explained that neither one of their worries came true. They both joined their chapters and have been loved and supported. Participant 15 included money as one of her hesitations. Participant 9 was not hesitant about recruitment, but she did admit that “I had my parents in my ear the whole time too.” Participant 9 also said, “I am a proud sorority woman, but I do not want that to be the first thing that people see, as in a sense like I am a person. And so, I guess that was kind of a concern going through; I was going to fall into that hole.” Many hesitations came from outside sources, whether that be how sororities are seen in media or people’s views of sorority girls, and many women talked about how they did not want to be viewed that way.

Several of the hesitations also had media in common. Participant 5 stated, “Beforehand, I forced myself to like watch a whole bunch of videos on YouTube, so I knew how it worked, and I knew what was going to happen. I wish I would have gone in not knowing what could happen.” One chapter had concerns and hesitations about how the media’s portrayal would project onto them. Participant 7 said, “Because fraternity and sorority life just has that negative connotation that these people are paying for their

friends and they are surface-level ... I definitely was like people are going to make fun of me as a sorority girl... I think my hesitations were outwardly based.” Participant 8 was worried about how the media portrays sororities, and she did not want to be portrayed that way.

Popular Media

Attentiveness to Sororities on Media Before Recruitment

The fifteen interviewees were asked if they paid attention to sororities on different media platforms leading up to recruitment. All fifteen looked at some form of each chapter’s social media during recruitment. Nine of fifteen participants looked at each sorority’s social media before going through recruitment. Many of them were interested in finding out more about each chapter’s philanthropies and the recruitment process in general. They also looked to find a way to distinguish each chapter from another. The following responses are from the women who looked at social media before recruitment.

Participant 1: “Yes, I did... I definitely paid attention to different ones and what they were involved in by looking at their social media. I could see their philanthropy events and stuff like that and see the girls together in the pictures they took. But, I took it with a grain of salt because it is social media, and I did not want it to influence too much.”

Participant 5: “Oh yeah! I tried to know everything I could possibly know, which I wish I wouldn’t have done because social media does not present correctly in some cases. Going through, I had a set one that I wanted really bad, or like I really had three that I really really wanted, and I didn’t necessarily pay attention to the other ones because I did but just created a mindset that if you weren’t in these then you might as well not be

in one thing, so I really harshly judged and just did not give some of them a shot like I should have. Um, even like Alpha Chi was not on my radar because I was paying attention to these other ones, but as I was like going through recruitment, I noticed that they were not the same as social media.”

Participant 11: “Yes. Well, social media has a big outlook on how you view someone and obviously, before I came up here, I followed all the sororities on social media and Instagram and looked at who I would be with. But I kind of looked and kind of tried to fit myself where I would look decent and where I would work, but honestly, throughout recruitment, that changed as well. It definitely affected my view. Seeing what the girls looked like and who I looked like who I thought I would fit in the best with, it definitely had a bigger impact going through recruitment; I had that mindset of where I thought I looked good and where I thought I would end up. And it did come true, which is weird. Yeah, it definitely did affect me.”

Participant 12: “Yes, I did. To some extent, it made me more excited but to another side, it also made me hesitant because I feel like sororities kind of - I do not know if this sounds stereotypical - come across as sort of perfect and very polished and girly and that type of thing, and I feel like I am all those things too, but I think that it is intimidating when you see it on social media, and that is all you see.”

Participant 13: “I looked through the social media on the website and just looked through several members’ pages as well and looked at all the activities they did.”

Of the four participants who did not look at social media before recruitment, three of them investigated the sororities’ social media once recruitment started or when they signed up. Only one participant reported that they did not look at any type of social

media. The participants who did not look originally watched the recruitment videos for each chapter. The four participants, who originally did not look at media before recruitment, were asked a follow-up question to see if social media might have affected their view or others' view if they would have looked at it. All four quickly answered yes. The other nine were also asked to expand further on how social media impacts recruitment. Participant 2 stated, "I 100% think that looking at social media impacts them. I think that sororities already have a big vision of perfect, and it is not so." Participant 4 talked about how certain chapters reached out to her and followed her on social media; therefore, she briefly looked because they had engaged with her in that way. She also mentioned that a particular sorority was so pretty, which made her want to be one. Participant 9 stated, "The biggest thing I can think of immediately is like how, this goes back to recruitment concepts in general, is that people want to be, people naturally gravitate to people who look like them, and people who they think have the same values as them and so if those values as them. And so, if those values are portrayed on social media...that's what I am going to be." Participant 7 stated, "...being able to not really know these people's personalities but see them on social media and maybe like hmm I could see myself here, or these look like girls I can make friends out of or maybe this energy in this post may not be the energy that I would fit in well, and so I think that it is very impactful on somebody's recruitment process, especially within the past year."

Sorority Women's Views on How Sororities are Portrayed in Media

Fourteen out of fifteen women talked negatively about how the media portrays sororities. Included below are quotes from each woman on this topic.

Participant 1: “I definitely feel that sororities have a bad reputation, and it is very much like you have to fit this mold to be involved in it...And it is sort of sad because I do not feel as if there is any mold that I have to fit into, and it is sad that they have that reputation in the media.”

Participant 2: “...I think it is portrayed terribly...I just do not think they see all of those things (philanthropies and service), and I would not either if I was not in the chapter or in another chapter. And so, I just think that when a sorority portrays it is kind of put off as a fake and perfect world, and when I about when other media platforms put it out there, I think it is kind of more harm than good...”

Participant 3: “...just because you see all these negative things on the news does not mean that is all that it is. There is a lot more to it that they do not show you. I definitely think that the news portrays not only sororities but panhellenic life in general in a very negative connotation. And there are a lot of things that need to be addressed and worked on so that can be fixed. But what a lot of people do not realize is that a lot of great things come out of them as well.”

Participant 4: “...think about Legally Blonde, that is not real. You have a stereotypical sorority girl; you have a stereotypical fraternity man. And I think how they say good news is no news; the news is only going to report bad things that happen within fraternity and sorority life, so you are never going to hear about the good things that happen within sorority life. The only news that we get about a sorority or fraternity is when something bad happens, and then you go back to the stereotypes that you have from Legally Blonde.”

Participant 5: “I think they are portrayed as two different types. I think there is the sorority’s interpretation on their Instagram because they look perfect or they try to and put out the best that they can because it is understandable. And I think there is another side where it is party girls, and they are portrayed as being bad and not doing what they are supposed to and not following the rules. Um, and I think both are wrong to be honest with you.”

Participant 7: “Sororities are definitely portrayed in the media as parties; everyone connotes Greek organization/fraternity and sorority life as drunk, parties, daddy’s money... But I do feel like sorority women do kind of bear the weight of that negative connotation and that stereotype more so than the fraternities do.”

Participant 8: “In movies, sorority women are portrayed as party girls, dumb, and uneducated. A lot of people do not know the logistics behind being in a sorority, such as philanthropies, and just focus on the parties for the storylines.”

Participant 9: “...you know sometimes I see sorority life portrayed in social media from women who are in it as being portrayed as if you were looking through rose-colored glasses. That’s my opinion from someone who loves my chapter, coming from someone who loves the panhellenic life, but also coming from someone who sees through stuff like that, I can see that. And I think, if we are talking about how that affects people, then it kind of makes people who don’t necessarily want to identify with those kinds of things, it makes them, even though they might be a great sorority woman, it’s kind of exclusive in a sense and that’s not cool either in fraternity and sorority life.”

Participant 10: “I know that a lot of times in TV shows or like on social media you see drinking and partying and the social aspect of it. Um, I don’t really know why it

is really portrayed that way like...but I think that maybe it's because of our culture...so I think that is like attractive to people, I don't know really."

Participant 11: "Well, obviously, sororities are portrayed as if you buy your friends. They are portrayed as girly girls, girls going to college to get their Mrs. Degrees, and to an extent I, have seen that, and it is true to an extent. But it overshadows the girls I see who like work their butts off... And it is annoying for people to be like oh, you're a dumb girl. You are in a sorority and even in Phi Mu, being a blonde, ditzy girl, I am like I am going to law school in like four years; that is not who I am. When I talk to people, they are like this is not who I thought you were based on your social media, and I am like wow that is how I am portrayed."

Participant 12: "I think that sororities have a very negative stereotype about them for the most part. A lot of people think that hazing is still a thing, but it is not; it is illegal. I also think that the sororities have the stereotype that not being diverse or having a diverse mindset for their members to join. I think they have a stereotype that there is one type of woman who will be in this chapter, and that is it. And in my opinion, I think that is wrong, and in my opinion, that is what I see on the media that you are hearing people's opinion on recruitment that did not go through and just have a really negative stigma about it. I feel like they are portrayed this way because sororities do not broadcast that they are any different than what their stereotype is. I think a lot of them, like I said earlier on social media, portray themselves as just one type of women in a very polished, nothing is wrong with them. I think sororities are portrayed this way, and if that is the only thing that they post, then you know why else or why there would be a different mindset or ideas about sororities if that is what they all post and that everyone sees."

Participant 13: “I feel like in social media it is like portrayed as we are paying for our friends, we are doing all sorts of things that isn’t what we really do, and yes, it is what social media tries to promote and change the ways which we are, but we aren’t. I know for a fact I do not pay for my own friends; I make my own friends...”

Participant 14: “I think they are portrayed in a way that you have to be the best version of yourself like they are not going to accept you for who you are, like very cookie-cutter, but I do not think it is that way at all. And I also think it depends on the person as well who is portraying it.”

Participant 15: “...I think in most movies, sororities are portrayed poorly. They are seen as a bunch of women who party all the time. Quite frankly, most movies also make the women seem unintelligent. Reflecting on this question, I cannot think of one show/movie that has an accurate representation of any sorority. For example, they always include some form of hazing, and they do not show any real bonds between the sisters. As far as why they are portrayed as this stereotype, I think it is because it is easy for others to point out all of the negatives with fraternity and sorority life instead of trying to show the other side of it. In the media industry, drama sells, and if they showed what really went on and what sororities stood for, less people would watch it. These are shows that young girls grow up watching, and it leaves a negative image for years, and it would make it harder for future generations to fully trust their sororities.”

As shown above, many of the women are disappointed in the negative stereotype the media portrays. However, as soon as they finished discussing how the media gives sororities a negative image, each woman immediately turned around and said that is not her experience or an accurate portrayal of sorority life at USM. Only one of the fifteen

women, Participant 6, said sororities were shown in a positive light, but then she mentioned that it takes one situation to bring about a negative connotation.

Some participants shared key quotes that showed that sororities are not represented accurately on social media. Participant 2 explained that the philanthropic and community aspect of sororities are not shown the best on social media by stating, "...I think it is portrayed terribly...I just do not think they see all of those things (philanthropies and service), and I would not either if I was not in the chapter or in another chapter." Being in a chapter allows one to see much more than people looking in from the outside. Participant 12 talked through why others might only see negative connotations, "I feel like they are portrayed this way because sororities do not broadcast that they are any different than what their stereotype is...I think sororities are portrayed this way, and if that is the only thing that they post, then you know why else or why would there be a different mindset or ideas about sororities if that is what they all post and that everyone sees." Participant 15 related the negative references of sororities to the media industry, which could be a driving factor in how they are represented, "I think it is because it is easy for others to point out all of the negatives with fraternity and sorority life instead of trying to show the other side of it. In the media industry, drama sells, and if they showed what really went on and what sororities stood for, less people would watch it." Participant 3 concluded by saying, "And there are a lot of things that need to be addressed and worked on so that (negative connotations) can be fixed. But what a lot of people do not realize is that a lot of great things come out of them as well."

Representation of Sororities to Future Women Considering Joining

Each woman had ideas about how to better portray sororities in the media to encourage women to go through recruitment and join and to show society that they are more than what the media portrays. Many of the participants talked about wanting sororities to show realistic, natural, and genuine pictures on their social media pages. Participant 12 shared her thoughts on this topic, “I would also like to see just more realistic pictures and realistic activities, like it is beautiful if you are standing in front of a painted mural and that type of thing, but it is not your everyday type of picture.” Two of the women suggested not making the pages look so cohesive and show diversity. Participant 9 said, “I definitely feel like, I feel like sometimes the same women, and not even the same types of women, are represented by sororities and like I said earlier, that leads to exclusion in a sense, like unconscious exclusion...and show you do not have to put a filter on every single picture...they all have the same aesthetic and that is not who we are.” Another topic the majority of women suggested the media and individual sororities should show is the dedication to each chapter’s philanthropy and community service. Participant 6 suggests, “I feel that the ‘outside world’ does not fully comprehend the positive impact the sororities have on the community at large, and I feel that if they did see that, we would have a more positive representation in the media.” Participant 8 wanted more campus involvement shown and highlight how much sororities raise for their philanthropies. One woman suggested that the news cover a story on a chapter in the way that sorority women define sorority. Participant 3 states, “It would be nice to see sororities depicted in the way that I depict them, you know, as a sorority woman. Maybe someone could do a segment on sorority women and interview sorority women and how it has impacted their life and how it has benefitted them in all the positive ways instead of

the things we see from the news... I think it would be good for people kind of on the fence about going through recruitment, so they can see that they have gotten so many great amazing things out of their sorority, so I want to have that experience too.”

Overall, the women felt that there is more to being in a sorority than the media shows. Participant 4 states, “I wish it did not matter as much because it is supposed to be fun because fraternity and sorority life is not something you have to do when you come to college, but I think it enhances your college experience.” Participant 7 concludes by acknowledging that sororities can do more to help with the stereotype and show that sororities are more than just their names: “I do not think we actively pursue, I guess a plan of action to show that we are more than just letters and more than just that sorority girl stereotype on the social media forefront, so I would definitely like to see more people just showcase women who are really impactful...so pushing philanthropies and the fact that parties and wearing letters is the most meniscal part of being in a Greek organization would help a lot.”

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand why women choose to go through sorority recruitment at the University of Southern Mississippi, even though there are negative connotations associated with sororities in popular media. By asking the participants why they chose to go through recruitment, and what their motivations and hesitations were, the study was able to determine if popular media affected their decision to go through recruitment. Many of the women wanted to join a sorority because they had some connection to sorority life, whether that be family members or friends. The women had seen or heard stories about the friendships, involvement, and growth that a sorority could provide. The motivations to go through recruitment were very similar to why they wanted to join. The women were looking for friendships, connections, accountability, support, and ways to better themselves and the community. The impact that media had on motivations could be simplified to wanting the experience, happiness, and friends that the participants saw on social media; many times, they saw these things on friends of theirs on social media.

Hesitations could be traced to media and other sources, but the hesitations depended on each individual. Some hesitations came from family members who either had not been in a sorority or not been to college. The family members only knew about sororities from the media, and they did not want their relatives, women in the study, to join because of how the sororities were portrayed. Some hesitations were based on what others would think about the woman going through recruitment. For instance, some were told that they had people saying they did not see them joining a sorority because they

were not like the stereotypes shown in movies and media. Many of the women were aware of the negative connotations that sororities have, and they did not want to be associated with that type of behavior. Hazing, diversity, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and more were talked about when discussing negative connotations. Several of the hesitations that each woman had could be seen in the way sororities are portrayed in movies, social media, and the news. This shows that media does have an impact on the decision for one to go through recruitment. Also, a common occurrence was found with the hesitations. Each chapter's two members had similar hesitations, and they were different for each chapter. The following are examples: Sorority 1 wanted to find people with their values; Sorority 2 was not hesitant about the process; Sorority 3 was scared of the process and rejection; Sorority 4 was concerned with how others would view them for being sorority girls; Sorority 5 was not overly hesitant, but just a little nervous yet excited; Sorority 6 was hesitant about heavier topics such as hazing; Sorority 7 was not sure if sorority was for her, and Sorority 8 was not sure what to expect. These are conclusions the research drew based on the participants, so a larger study could be completed to further explore these trends. Also, the trend could be found that each sororities' participants paid about the same amount of attention to social media before recruitment.

All participants agreed that looking at social media would impact a woman going through recruitment. The media does not portray sorority life accurately and could influence a woman's thoughts about each chapter. Each woman who deeply looked at each chapter's social media admits they wish they had not, but it did help others to identify which chapter was which. All participants except one agreed that sororities are

portrayed poorly in the media. The negative connotation does not reflect the everyday lives of women in sororities. Many believe that sororities are portrayed negatively to sell dramas, movies, and views. These things do attract viewers, yet they are hindering the positive benefits sorority life provides; therefore, sororities need to work towards showing and advocating for the true image of Greek life. The participants suggested showing philanthropies, diversity, involvement, and realistic pictures to allow the world and future women coming through recruitment to see the positive impact it has had on their lives. Many women believe that sororities could do a better job at this, which could help people see the good in sororities in the media.

Limitations

This study had some limitations and challenges. No one volunteered to participate as one sorority's upperclassman. Therefore, the study had one less upperclassman's perspective, which limited the results. Also, the study had to overcome challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Research

Future research could include the Interfraternity Council and National Panhellenic Council in the study; these are the branches of fraternity and sorority life that include fraternities and historically African American men and women, respectively. Many movies and media have negative stereotypes of fraternity men, so it would be interesting to see what fraternity men believe would help create a more positive image for them. Also, the interview questions could be refined to be more specific. Choosing one type of media and investigating its contributions to stereotypes could be done for future research as well. Research could be done to see if each sorority has similarities in their

motivations, hesitations, and views on media. Finally, the research methods could be replicated with a larger number of participants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, how the media portrays sororities does have an impact on women deciding to go through sorority recruitment. It not only impacts their decision, but it also impacts how people view them and sorority life. Looking at social media might influence one's decisions throughout the recruitment process. The news and media can impact parents allowing their children to join a Greek organization and how people view women in sororities. The motivations to join a sorority are more inwardly driven; whereas, hesitations are more outwardly driven. To combat the negative stereotypes, sorority women could work on how they portray sorority life to show others the many benefits of it. Lastly, a quote from Participant 12 shows that sororities should continue to seek change to rid the negative connotations in the media: "If someone grows up and all they hear is that sororities are a certain way, then they are not going to do it. But if something changes on how they represent themselves, then possibly later on down the line, it could possibly grow the amount of girls going through recruitment."

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What year are you in college (freshman, junior, etc.)? Are you a transfer student?
2. What sorority are you affiliated with? How many years have you been a part of the sorority?
3. When did you go through recruitment?
4. Why did you decide to go through sorority recruitment?
5. Did you have any motivations to join or knew what you wanted to get out of the experience?
6. Did you have any hesitations going through recruitment?
7. Before going through recruitment, did you pay attention to sororities on different media platforms and if so, how did that affect your view on joining a sorority?
8. In your opinion, how are sororities portrayed in media, and why do you think they are portrayed this way?
9. How would you like to see sororities represented in the media to future women coming through recruitment?

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of
Research Integrity



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.
- FACE-TO-FACE DATA COLLECTION WILL NOT COMMENCE UNTIL USM'S IRB MODIFIES THE DIRECTIVE TO HALT NON-ESSENTIAL (NO DIRECT BENEFIT TO PARTICIPANTS) RESEARCH.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-20-269

PROJECT TITLE: Motivations for Sorority Recruitment and the Effects Popular Media and Society Have on Recruitment

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: Educational Research and Admin, Interdisciplinary Studies

RESEARCHER(S): Whitley Howell; Holly Foster

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: July 30, 2020

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald Sacco".

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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