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And None for Gretchen Weiners

Center for Public Service
Gettysburg College

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And None for Gretchen Weiners

Abstract

In the four years I've spent at Gettysburg College, it's safe to say that my experience has been largely influenced by my membership in Greek Life. I've developed a personal leadership style and feel accomplished by the strong relationships I built with other women. But this year, I developed a stronger understanding of the inequities that exist within the Greek community. [*excerpt*]

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Disciplines

Educational Sociology | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Higher Education | Inequality and Stratification | School Psychology | Social Psychology | Sociology | Sociology of Culture | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](http://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

AND NONE FOR GRETCHEN WEINERS

March 20, 2013

In the four years I've spent at Gettysburg College, it's safe to say that my experience has been largely influenced by my membership in Greek Life. I've developed a personal leadership style and feel accomplished by the strong relationships I built with other women. But this year, I developed a stronger understanding of the inequities that exist within the Greek community.



While my sorority benefits from a positive reputation, other chapters bear the brunt of negative stereotypes, comments, and jokes —perpetuated by both male and female students. The negativity is so severe that it impacts recruitment and philanthropy efforts as well as their personal lives.

Until recently, I never realized the “unearned assets” I had obtained by joining my organization. Inspired by Peggy McIntosh’s article, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”, here is a list of some of the privileges I have as a member of a sorority which is not plagued by years of negative stereotyping:

1. *I can arrange to be in the company of people of my social circle most of the time.*
2. *I can be pretty sure that my classmates will be neutral or pleasant to me upon finding out which chapter I belong to.*
3. *When I am advertising or promoting a campus-wide philanthropy event, I can count on my chapter affiliation not to work against the legitimacy or popularity of my event.*
4. *I can speak in public to a group of Greek leaders without putting my chapter on trial.*
5. *I can go home from most meetings within the Greek community feeling tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.*
6. *I can get a drink at a fraternity party without being hassled about my chapter affiliation.*
7. *I can safely assume that after speaking with a group of women who are not a part of my chapter, that when I walk away they do not talk about me as “ugly,” “fat,” “weird,” or that my sorority is “full of losers.”*

At Gettysburg College, students cannot rush until sophomore year. While positive for many reasons, the unintentional effect of this policy is that it provides a year for new students to develop impressions about each of

the chapters, inevitably adopting biased attitudes. As a result, many sophomores entered formal recruitment six months ago with extremely prejudiced opinions towards each chapter, proving disastrous for all chapters and some of the potential new members on Bid Night. By slighting other chapters and depicting their own chapter as the Holy-Grail-of-Gettysburg-Greek-life, many Greek women corrupted the mindset of sophomore women who would have initially been interested in joining any of the chapters.

Women are supposed to enter the process with the intention of joining Greek life, not just a specific sorority. Yet, when some women didn't get asked back by their preferred sororities, they chose to drop out of the formal recruitment process altogether. Since this was before Bid Night, the number of women each chapter was allowed to extend bids to shrunk drastically. This sudden change caused uproar within some chapters that had planned on asking over 40 women to join and left many sophomores very unhappy with their recruitment experience.

As a result, instead of being able to happily place the initial 200+ women who were interested in joining Greek life, we are left with unbalanced membership across all of the organizations. Not to mention, we perpetuated individual stereotypes and the overall label that sorority women are cutthroat, real-life clones of Rachel McAdams in Mean Girls.

I am not trying to say that the Greek community as a whole is corrupt, because there are many benefits to membership in a sorority that I didn't realize before I joined. However, I do think that negative stereotyping against individual chapters and the unfair advantages it subsequently gives to others is paramount. As women, we are often frustrated by sexism, lookism, homophobia, media's representation of our gender and more. Yet, we too are guilty of perpetuating the false belief that one group is intrinsically superior to another. An internalized sense of superiority and the promotion of it across campus is damaging to us as individuals and the recruitment process as a whole.

In fact, privilege is hurtful for everyone involved no matter what kind of privilege it is we're talking about. Sexism doesn't only hurt women—it hurts men, too, even if on the surface it appears that they benefit from gender inequality. It forces them to act in very particular ways and assigns [unfair stereotypes](#) to many men. Racism hurts whites in the long run, too. Every form of privilege, every stereotype and -ism we assign to someone, is [detrimental to all parties involved](#). It hurts not only psychologically or structurally, but mostly detracts from the opportunity for personal connection. In the case of Greek Life here at Gettysburg, it prevented some women from joining organizations that might have provided positive outlets to build relationships. In the case of race, gender, or class, it prevents people in privileged positions from collaborating with and learning from people who are different from themselves for the greater benefit of culture and society.

In order to improve Greek Life, we need to rethink the degrading, untrue stereotypes we give to others and reflect on our own privilege. If we don't, we will continue with a recruitment cycle that ends up harming ourselves, other women and the Greek system as a whole.

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