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The First Year Frat Experience

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The First Year Frat Experience

Abstract

It was September 14th and my three weeks were up. I had told myself I had three weeks to make friends. Three weeks before Greek life would dominate the social scene. Publicly, I decried the three week rule, writing it off as dumb or lame. Privately, a part of me wished it could last forever. That night, while my floor pregamed in their rooms, I stayed in mine. I spent a long night alone, listening to the music blasting from dorm rooms and down the streets. I decided to shut the lights off because I didn't want the world to see what a loser I was. Looking back, I don't think the world cared, they were too busy having a good time. I went to bed that night promising myself that I would not spend another Friday night alone in my room. I knew I was going to regret not going for a long time. Or so I thought. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

exclusion, frat bros, frat parties, Fraternities, fraternity brothers, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Greek Life, insecurity, masculinity, racism, sexism, toxic masculinity

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

Comments

Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College 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

THE FIRST YEAR FRAT EXPERIENCE

September 4, 2019

It was September 14th and my three weeks were up. I had told myself I had three weeks to make friends. Three weeks before Greek life would dominate the social scene. Publicly, I decried the three week rule, writing it off as dumb or lame. Privately, a part of me wished it could last forever. That night, while my floor pregamed in their rooms, I stayed in mine. I spent a long night alone, listening to the music blasting from dorm rooms and down the streets. I decided to shut the lights off because I didn't want the world to see what a loser I was. Looking back, I don't think the world cared, they were too busy having a good time. I went to bed that night promising myself that I would not spend another Friday night alone in my room. I knew I was going to regret not going for a long time. Or so I thought.

Friday night rolled around again and this time I was ready. I stuck with my floor all night for fear of losing them and thus my only ticket to a party. The other guys on my floor and I were calculating how to get in. How many girls we would need to bring along like cattle so that we could have the proper ratio to gain access. Trying to find the most attractive ones to sell to the brothers like fresh meat. I was so caught up in my selfish desire to gain entry that I ignored the perversity of the whole system. The same system that objectifies daughters, girlfriends, sisters, friends. The same hostile environment that relegates the majority of underrepresented students on campus into one house. The same mob mentality which turns otherwise friendly individuals into malicious sadists and perverts and undermines the self respect of female students and male pledges alike. But that night I didn't care, I'd do anything to get in. At midnight we were ready to go. We had four females for each male, a perfect ratio.

When we got to the frat it all happened so fast and not at all according to plan. The girls walked right up the path, onto the porch, and into the house. A great wall of guys closed in behind them, blocking our entry. There were ten of them and only four of us. They asked us questions to which there were no right answers. "Name two states that start with the letter 'F'", one demanded. The brother in the center was clearly high. He stared at us with blank, bloodshot eyes and then inched a little too close to me.

"Alright, seriously, I'll give you one try to guess my name," he said, his breath reeking of weed, "If you do, I'll let you in."

I didn't even try. Not only because I knew the chances of me guessing his name were next to impossible, but that even if I did, he still might not let us in. I tried to think of something funny to say. Maybe that would work. But before I could come up with anything, he had already forgotten the question as if he never expected an answer.

"Alright one, two, three, four," he counted, pointing to each one of us as he did. For a second I thought they were done messing with us and now that we had endured it patiently and they had had their laughs, they would acquiesce.

But he just pointed to the opposite side of the street saying, "izquierda," which is actually the Spanish word for left, but it was clear to us that he meant away.

"Get off the sidewalk!" they shouted, as if they owned it.

As we walked away, my friends were in disbelief.

"I expected to be treated with more respect," said one of my friends.

For many guys, getting past the entrance is only half the battle. The remainder of the night is spent trying to stay there. I remember trying not to attract too much attention to myself but also not looking vulnerable. I had seen multiple people thrown out for not blending in. The frat brothers would say something like, "You're killing the vibe in here," as they ushered out some poor kid who had been standing off to the side. Be too bold, however, and I could find myself meeting the same fate. The brothers don't take kindly to anyone having a better time than them. They can detect when a freshman is comfortable and do their best to stop it. Ever since my first frat party, I have worn my hat backwards in order to blend in with them and it actually seems to do the trick. To them I am just a fellow douchebag in my natural habitat so no one bothers me.

Why does "the mob" of frat brothers act like this? The majority of them are just following along. Afraid to appear weak and not wanting anyone to question their place, they shift the attention to vulnerable freshmen. Landing a spot in a fraternity is usually a difficult and humiliating ordeal and they aren't about to lose that power. In our society, kindness often has a weak connotation in relationships between men. For some guys, being a jerk to other men provides a false sense of masculinity. For others, mistreating women gives them a false sense of dominance. In reality, it only highlights a fundamental character flaw—their own insecurity.

So if women don't enjoy being catcalled, harassed, and assaulted at frat parties, and men don't enjoy the constant anxiety over getting in and then fear of being thrown out, why do we go? Is there truly no better alternative on the weekends? Our attendance and our tolerance of the treatment and conditions gives them their power. But fear keeps the system alive. Fear of missing out – the fear that had me feeling like a loser alone in my room last year is the same fear that pushes me to perform masculinity when I go to the frats. Until the day students decide not to go to frats or [the school decides to ban them](#), the system of toxic masculinity will live on.

I know not every aspect of Greek life is negative. But as an observer, I am fascinated by the fact that a school so aware and committed to tolerance during the day can be so blind to sexism, racism, and other various forms of abuse at night.

Anonymous