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ESTHER WRIGHT, AUTHOR, *TORN TOGAS: THE DARK SIDE OF CAMPUS GREEK LIFE*

Lincoln, and a member of Gamma Phi Beta, members have a financial advisor to take care of their bills and a housekeeper to keep the sorority clean.

"What you have is a group of girls who are being babysat — the only major responsibility they are given is party planning," Wright says.

So what's holding these women back? The NPC points to campus rule makers, campus rule makers point to individual chapter rules and chapters generally point to tradition. Many women say it's purely a matter of discrimination. Joan Mocek, a member of Alpha Phi at the U. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, says that sorority life is riddled with unfair differences.

"Fraternity houses on our campus can have alcohol, sororities can't. We have a rule that men aren't allowed upstairs after midnight," she says. "In a fraternity, women can be over whenever."

Certainly, respecting and perpetuating their forebear's long-standing traditions is an integral part of the Greek culture — one Greeks look upon with pride. But as the idea of a "woman's place" has evolved in society, the concept of tradition for today's Greek women has changed from a source of pride to a source of embarrassment.

For Wright, the burden of tradition became obvious at her first house meeting.

"The first thing I noticed is that we had to wear dresses or skirts to our meetings. It clued me in to a number of things that weren't only old-fashioned, but also a little sexist. They encourage you to fit the submissive role," she says.

Mocek's experience is equally telling: "There are old traditions such as serenading, where women have to go over to the fraternities and sing and bring them gifts, bring them food. I didn't really buy into that part of it."

Brotherly love?

Few women do. Serenades are one of the oldest of Greek traditions, dating back to the days when a fraternity man would come courting and sing to his "steady." Well, these days it's men and women serenading — but it's hardly the sweet ballads of days gone by.

For women, Mocek says it was a known fact in her house that the more provocative the women are in their singing, and the tighter the clothes they wear, the better. She says members in her house are often encouraged to sit on the laps of men they are singing to, in order to emulate or one-up rival sororities.

"I would think to myself, 'I wouldn't do that in normal life, why would I here?'"

Women as sex objects is a theme resounding through many fraternity serenades as well. In 1992, the UCLA-based feminist magazine, *together* (now called *Fem*) received an anonymous copy of a Phi Kappa Psi songbook. One song, "S & M Man," contained lyrics depicting female genital mutilation.

In 1987, the magazine also recovered a 1987 Zeta Beta Tau pledge party invite with lyrics of a sexual and violent nature.

Treated like objects, managed like children, but expected to grow socially, academically and personally? Does this formula make any sense?

Making change

To its credit, the Greek system isn't turning up a collective nose at these problems. Sorority rush at many schools — like Michigan State U., Creighton U. and Carthage College — has begun a gradual evolution from the usual one-week block to a more relaxed three-weekend rush, easing the pressure of the decision-making process.

And, with the creation of the 1991 NPC rush resolution, aspects once considered integral to a successful rush — decorations, costumes, gifts, favors and entertainment — are now considered petty.

"Basically the overall point of the resolution was to refocus the rush process. Instead of spending money on costumes and skits and things, the emphasis is on getting to know the rushees and practicing conversational skills," says Merritt Olsen, coordinator of education programs for the NPC.

Falling in with a more purposeful step as well, some sororities, such as Gamma Phi Beta at the U. of Alabama, are recognizing serenades as "frivolous" and dropping the tradition.

Finally, at the prodding of the NPC and IFC, all sororities and fraternities are engaging in sexual harassment and assault awareness activities and workshops.

Still, the debate between what is tradition and what is gender discrimination rages on.

Operation alternative

In response, many schools are creating new traditions.

Since the early '90s, schools like Trinity, Middlebury and Bowdoin Colleges have abolished the Greek system as students knew it, and forged a new system based on mutual alliance: coed social fraternities.

A fair share of resistance initially intercepted the decision. Some students and many Greek

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national organizations did and still do refuse to recognize coed social fraternities. One student at Middlebury sued — unsuccessfully — contending that the school was restricting students' right to choose. Nonetheless, the colleges are confident they made the right choice.

Phil Benoit, director of public affairs for Middlebury, says the six coed fraternities on campus are

a success. And unlike their previous Greek system, they're "keeping with the school's liberal arts philosophy and with the behavior of general society."

What about the arguments that a gender-mixed house might regress into the classic structure that puts men in leadership positions and women in subservient ones? There is some friction on the subject, says Amy Starr, a member of the nationally recognized coed fraternity Kappa Delta Rho at Middlebury.

Though Starr occupied positions as vice president and president in the house, she says members are constantly debating whether it is gender or ability that catapults certain members to the top of the hierarchy.

However, she adds, the real world is no different, and that is a benefit to coed members. By sharing all the common duties, both men and women in a coed fraternity see each other as more than just a person to date, she says.

"Coed is very much about the people," Starr says. "[It's about] getting beyond stereotypes of a social house. Diversity facilitates that."

And if coed isn't an option? Many women join a social fraternity and a professional fraternity.

Tomle, also a member of Pi Tau Sigma, a mechanical engineering honor society, says being a member of both is duly fulfilling: The sorority offers her a network of more than 100 women her own age, sharing common experiences, while the professional fraternity offers her a network of people on her same career path.

As for the rest of the women dissatisfied with their role in the Greek system but unwilling to leave sorority life, Mocek says don't despair.

"There are people in the Greek system who realize it needs changing. Slowly but surely I think an equal balance will be found between sororities and fraternities. I foresee it taking 10 to 20 years, but with some effort, it will happen."

Since Lynda Twardowski is Polish, she didn't think she could be Greek.



Is this what the writers of the Panhellenic Creed meant when they said, "We, the Undergraduate Members of women's fraternities, stand for ... serving, to the best of our ability, our college community."?



Guest Expert:
Joel Respass

On Greeks:
"I live in shanty town, and we don't have any fraternity houses here — just a shanty deluxe."