

Friday Magazine

The Greek Myth



From Outside Looking Back In

Brent Anderson

This is an appeal to the plebes. Or the pledges. Or the toads. Or whatever affectionate nickname has been bestowed upon you by your fraternity elders while you wait to join their ranks. For now that rush has ended and you are strutting around campus with the symbol of your affiliation so proudly affixed to your chest, some thought needs to be given to the venture you have just plunged into. The fraternity experience can be a constructive and enjoyable endeavor. Conversely, it can also become wrought with frustration and later lament. Unfortunately this lament overshadowed my journey through the torrid realm of greekdom and played a central role in cutting it short.

I made the rush down fraternity row before I had even attended classes at this school. On the behest of high school acquaintances who lived in my dormitory, I accompanied them on their predetermined quest to obtain membership.

It was partly out of boredom, but my decision to participate in rush stemmed more from an inborn curiosity — to know for my own benefit just what was behind these somewhat mysterious and controversial groups known as fraternities. Prior to my arrival in Santa Barbara, my lone impressions of greek societies came largely from stereotypical portrayals in books and movies and from attending an occasional party at San Diego State while still in high school. So I saw a need to get the full picture on my own.

It was an unusual move for me at this point in my life. I was hardly the picture of fraternity material. The anarchic nature of my high school personality still predominated and I kept quite an eclectic wardrobe. I had no connections or friends in high places. And I had a well defined distaste for regimentation and tradition. Yet I still saw a new adventure waiting to be explored, a part of college life to supplement the ongoing list of things that I've tried in my life.

Needless to say, I was pretty excited when the one fraternity I had any inkling of interest in extended an invitation for membership. I had no idea what was in store for me. Many of my friends were incredulous at my entering the greek system. But I accepted the bid without hesitation.

Suddenly I was a greek. I wore a pledge pin and was thrown together with the seventeen other strangers that constituted a pledge class. I studied fraternity history. I was part of that network of men and women who associate each other by means of sweatshirts emblazoned with Alphas, Thetas and Chis. I even cleaned the house. But this new bustle of activity and duty seemed to take a back seat to what I viewed as the real significance of this group of guys.

What appealed to me most was the simple fact that at the time this was all this fraternity was — a group of guys. I arrived on their doorstep not long after they had gotten their act together. No divisive or intimidating cliques were visible. The actives were just as new as the pledges. And the idea of falling prey to questionable influences of the greek "system" seemed a distant and implausible reality. They were just proud to have a house to call their own.

It seemed a fantastic opportunity to a freshman feeling the first tinges of displacement in this new college environment — 50 new friends and a chance to get my hand into the building of something on this campus. The label of fraternity was purely a technicality. Sure, we were part of the same network of UCSB fraternities and sororities. But we were determined to turn tradition on its ear and add a new twist to a rigid framework.

The encouraging thing at the time was that it was working. Our group was extremely diversified and each member had his own particular interests. Not everyone got along but we were organized and respected what made each of us unique. At a time of our lives when male vulnerability and sensitivity is considered taboo, sheltered under tender egos, this large concentration of young men were stretching those limits. We got into each other. We partied together and confided in one another. While not completely flawless it exemplified the meaning of "brotherhood," a word that fraternities tout openly and so often erroneously.

(Please see page 2A)



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Sororities: The Fla

Sarah Na

As the greek system of UCSB continues to grow, so do the myths which both hinder its reputation and demand reflection by its members. Naturally, there will always be misconceptions of any organization by people who are not involved. Also natural are the defensive refutations of any negative hearsay by the members themselves. In truth, there is an unsaid balance between myths and defenses concerning sororities on this campus. Having been a very active member for two years, I have developed a clear perspective of the myths, the great benefits, and intrinsic flaws of the system.

Well known is the stereotype of the UCSB sorority woman. First, she must have plenty of money, none of which she earned herself. Not only are sororities expensive, but what chapter would be interested in a girl who has not come from the "proper socio-economic background?" When she joins, she "fits in" well with the chapter because they choose people who are just like themselves. If she is different in any respect, she simply conforms to the group. Thus, they wear the same clothes, listen to the same music, take the same sociology classes, and lose all individuality. The sorority girl, of course, has access to all tests, papers, and notes for all of her classes. If she needs any help, there are always people around to assist in her methods of academic dishonesty. The sorority girl not only drinks, but drinks to excess and far more frequently than non-greek people. Most of all, she considers herself first a greek, and second a student. She cares not about campus and community issues, but only about her social life and her looks.

This is the myth. This is the result of generalizations, fabrications, and absolute misconceptions about a very large group of people with extremely diverse membership. Generally speaking, any large group is prone to being stereotyped based on the actions of a few members. Perhaps the only notice some people

take of sorority women is when they are at a party. Sure, beer is served. Sure, people want to meet each other. But, what about any I.V. party? People are certainly similar at those functions to any greeks at a party. People drink. People dance. People want to meet each other. Overlooked in both groups are the abstainers. Unnoticed are those who don't get drunk. Not talked about are those who simply have a good time and go home, to their respective beds. Let's face it. It's much more fun to point out the drunk ones who make a scene.

The stereotype described is not representative of any one member, let alone the entire group. Money, for instance, is a popular subject among myth promoters. Yes, each sorority does require membership dues. Many people believe one must have endlessly generous parents to pay for dues. However, like the rest of the UCSB student population, many sorority members work. Some put themselves through school independently. It would be interesting to find out just how many students at UCSB are supported completely or partially, by their parents. Considering this UC campus has the highest mean of parental income, a great many of us are probably getting such assistance. Sororities are not likely to have a disproportionate number of financially dependent members compared to the campus overall. Another point often overlooked is that living in the chapter house is almost invariably cheaper than an I.V. apartment. My combined room, board, dues in the house were considerably less than my rent alone in my apartment now. Many sororities also offer scholarships, financial aid, and loans to assist their members.

Unlike the myth suggests, sororities actively seek women of diversity. There are no sororities which will not accept someone on the basis of race or religion. Chapters are full of members from differing backgrounds. Great varieties in tastes, beliefs, political views, and goals exist in

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Looking Back In

(Continued from cover)

Soon the ranks started to grow. With this inevitable expansion came new questions. Could we maintain what we had started, and could those ideals be transferred effectively to future members. Was the friendship that characterized the group to remain our primary emphasis. A nagging doubt started to materialize in my head.

I'm not normally a cynic. But looking back, we were perhaps a bit too naive in trying to escape the grip of the system of which our group was undeniably a part. The process of rush was unavoidable. So were the pranks, the hearsay gossip and the stereotypical reputations.

Our lofty visions were easily subverted and it was evident everywhere, but especially at rush time. When the fraternity was fresh, everyone was an equal. Yet the inherently flawed ritual known as rush changed all that. Now we had to make choices; to decide who was "worthy" enough of joining our order. We had to judge people by three days of conversation so contrived that it made a blind date a preferable alternative by comparison.

It bred feelings of exclusivity that have yet to leave. The prevailing criterion was no longer that a rushee be witty, bright, unusual, amiable or a loyal friend. Those were the old days. We had since made a name for ourselves and had a new image to uphold. Prospective pledges had to exhibit their capacity to be good looking or athletic so they could compete with other fraternities and impress the sororities, which had become our most important constituency by far.

In the end, arguments against this now majority mindset proved futile. All I could hear were self-stroking revelations about how these were such "great" guys, how we were "moving forward" in the system and how sororities "just love us" — with no clear concept of why or how these comments were justifiable. For the first time the unforeseen danger of fraternities was being clarified. Once one became wrapped up in them, the blinders were hard to get off.

In relation to itself, all this stifling realm produced was subjective opinion. It required a trip outside the fishbowl to really notice how true this was. As my interests and circle of friends at school diversified, I got the chance to balance my bias and attain an

objective overview of the situation. What evident was that a lot of the criticism leveled at the greek system was valid. And that once your membership in the system was solidified, you did not want to leave it. It had a bad reputation.

All that mattered in this disjointed value system was the superficial, characterized by an obsession with appearance and rampant materialism. This was the familiar criticism. But lives truly revolved around the fraternity and the apartment complex that was its nerve center. The major concern became to sandwich in a trip to Gold's Gym before the night's social outing. How the softball team was to beat another fraternity that had recently been labeled a "rival." Or when were you going to get your dues.

Faults are always easier to find than attributes, especially when identified by a disenfranchised outsider. I do not absolve myself from guilt of these counts for I was a full-fledged member of the group that propagated them. But in an effort to change the situation inside out and put it in perspective, recognizing the adverse effects of these problems was imperative.

I say this because I am no longer able to maintain the status as a force of change in my fraternity. The person I represent is different from that of a few years ago, so too is the face of the brotherhood. The greek system however, remains the same.

I don't regret my days as a "frat boy." I just wish I could have seen and been prepared for what was coming. Whether new blood can buck the system remains to be seen. There are three new sororities on campus this year and their ability to collect a large number of new recruits points to a new student interest in these organizations. But for all the reasons. Fraternities and sororities have the potential for fostering personal growth, many friendships and, by their sheer number of members, constructive action in the community. It is when we are allowed to revert to their own encapsulated world that their good intentions and utility are lost in a sea of complacency. Allowing the system to snuff out new idealism and vision will only lead us to wade further into the morass that it has created for itself.



Flaws, The Myths

h Nath

every group. Despite the reputation, greeks are also very active on campus and in the community. A.S. has representatives who are greek. University committees have many greek leaders and members. In fact, the university often calls on the greek system to provide assistance and input on many projects. The local community benefits greatly from greek support. Programs such as Special Olympics, blood drives, The Very Special Arts Festival, and many others receive many hours of help and large monetary donations from greeks.

So, where does this stereotype come from? It is the result of filtered perceptions by people who don't look deeply enough to see the entire picture. It is the result of labeling a group because groups are easily targeted. It is the result of our natural tendency to seek out faults in a system and overlook the foundations which benefit and strengthen the system.

Flaws are certain to exist in any large operation. Perhaps the most serious flaw in the sorority system is rush, the process by which new members are chosen. It is agreed by nearly all members and rushees that the system is not perfect for anyone. However, it is my opinion that it is detrimental to individuals, artificially induces emotions, and could be simplified to benefit everyone. Involving a week-long dorm stay for \$200, rush forces women to live together during a time when some are elated and some are dejected. This situation perpetuates chapter stereotypes, and causes many women to reject chapters they may otherwise choose. It costs a great deal of time, money, and emotional energy. Perhaps a better system would be completely opposite of the highly structured one in existence. Interested women could attend a series of open houses, being invited to return as the week progresses. Dorm housing could be optional, allowing most rushees to live away from the stress and influence others. Unfortunately, this system will probably never be

used here. Fear of change, fear of unstructured activity, and satisfaction with a faulty system will keep the existing system in use.

Aside from rush, most sorority members have found considerable gains from being greek. The most obvious benefit is social interaction. It truly does allow one to meet people outside of the dorms with whom they may remain friends throughout college. In such a large group, one also is exposed to a wide variety of information concerning campus and community activities available. Each chapter participates in philanthropic events, giving local and national groups their time and the money they raise. Members are able to share information about majors, campus academic programs, and career opportunities. Each member is encouraged to experience leadership positions. Through these she learns about group management and leadership on a peer level. In addition, membership in a national sorority, as are all chapters at UCSB, is for a lifetime. Alumnae chapters exist across the nation and greatly benefit newcomers to towns. They also offer continuous community involvement in service.

While misconceptions about the greek system are inevitable, both members and non-members can work toward better understanding. Stereotypes are perpetuated by those who fail to see beyond isolated events or negative aspects of the system. It is the responsibility of the members to present a more complete picture of their functions. The role of non-members is to be receptive to new perspectives. They must understand that members are first students, then greeks. The myth will always exist, as will flaws in the system. Opening our minds to understand both sides will allow us all to benefit from the greek system as a university and as individuals.

Sarah Nath, a senior pre-med student, was the 1986-87 Panhellenic President.



editor:
Laurie L. McCullough

contributors:
Brent Anderson
Ted King
Sarah Nath

Greek Individuality

Ted King

The greek system is right for many people, but not for everyone. The system like every other large organization of individuals has its problems, and its attributes. Due to its large size of nearly 2,000 members, and extensive public exposure it is an easily identifiable target for criticism. Stereotyping greeks has made them that much more susceptible to finger-pointing. Media influence further creates images of a typical frat-boy or sorority girl. As educated students we have a responsibility to see the ignorance of these stereotypes. Individuality has a right to be recognized.

In the past I have heard people categorize greeks as people who do nothing but drink, party, and worry about what clothes to wear. Those claims are ludicrous. They are referring to 2,000 students (at a school that admits only the top 12 percent of all high school students) who cannot be simply classified as a bunch of materialistic drunkards who don't study or spend time working on community affairs. 2,000 people cannot be stereotypically categorized.

Focus in on these people as human beings, individuals, and we realize that they are the same as any other students interested in getting a college education; only their education extends to being a member of a fraternity or sorority. Students who are greeks are involved in all of the campus organizations that are available to every other student. They are involved in student affairs such as the Community Affairs Board, the Associated Students (in the past four years at least two of the A.S. presidents have been members of greek organizations), the Daily

Nexus, student-run organizations such as Students for Peace, the La Cumbre school yearbook, inter-collegiate athletic teams, CSO employees, dramatic artists, teacher's aids, and members of various religious organizations, in addition to numerous other activities. Essentially they are just students. People of every race, creed, and color with different political, moral, and ethical beliefs. It would be ridiculous to classify these people as the same when everyone's beliefs are individual.

To maintain individuality all stereotypes have to be abolished. The accusations that fraternities and sororities breed conformity are somewhat valid in that there is peer pressure in all large organizations. However, generally individuality represents the strength of the person who possesses it. Most people respect a person when they adamantly stand for what they believe. When and if conformity does occur it is usually due to the fact that some individuals are just more comfortable being a follower than a leader.

The average student at UCSB agrees to his or her own lifestyle. People have the choice of joining a greek letter organization or not joining one. We are fortunate to have a campus with a strong greek system, but also a campus where you do not have to be a greek to be content. Students who join fraternities and sororities are individuals, and it is ignorant to categorize them. If you get right down to it we are just talking about people.

Ted King, a senior majoring in economics, was the 1986-87 Inter-Fraternity Council President.

FRIDAY MAGAZINE

annual prose contest

Manuscripts must be typed, double spaced, with author's name and phone number included.

Entries must not exceed 1,500 words, and may be submitted with related illustrations or graphics.

Submissions of merit will be published and winners will receive awards of \$25 for first place, \$15 for second place, and \$10 for third place.

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