Skeval, Julia: How Fraternities Buy Into and Promote Hegemonic Masculinity

Abstract:

College fraternities and their members are highly susceptible to negative stereotypes regarding their ideologies, behavior and mistreatment of people outside their organizations. A majority of these stereotypes, however, are based in truth. For decades, fraternities have portrayed themselves to be the peak of masculinity; who all men should strive to be this sentence does not make sense grammatically and should be restructured. Fraternities fall under the scope of homosocial interaction, which creates spaces that are exclusively populated by men and are characterized by certain traits that combine to form an ideology of male superiority (Bird 1996). Homosocial interactions also link closely with the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity by supporting identities and behaviors that fit hegemonic ideals and repressing those that don't. Homosocial relational groups are consistently recreated through the shared and adopted hegemonic characteristics that members pass down to new members - hence this is why fraternities have survived for so long and see no signs of slowing down.

This presentation will discuss in further detail how homosocial interaction and hegemonic masculinity allow fraternities to continue operating as they do (Roychowdhury 2014; Bird 1996). Then it will break down four distinct categories, identified through research, through which fraternities are able to maintain and promote hegemonic masculinity. These categories are the pledge process, the use of alcohol, the sexual objectification or conquest of women, and violence (McCreaddy 2018; West 2001; Bird 1996; Rhoads 1995; Martin and Hummer 1989). Fraternities use their pledge process to unite the pledges into a group and teach them how to act as the fraternity expects them to. Alcohol is thought to be a test of one's masculinity: if they are willing to drink, what they are willing to drink and how much they are willing to drink. Fraternity men have normalized the sexual coercion of women and use it as a tool to assert their dominance as superior and more powerful. Finally, violence is seen as a goal one should try to achieve, both in being able to withstand it and inflict it sentence is a bit unclear... is violence a goal in itself or is it a mean to an end (or ends)?

Then, the presentation will discuss the findings of a survey of Geneseo students to evaluate opinions on Geneseo fraternities and, specifically, which ones are seen as more and less masculine. I originally hypothesized that there would be one, clear specific fraternity deemed most masculine and one, clear fraternity deemed least masculinity masculine but the results from both survey questions yielded very mixed results. Survey participants had an array of different answers as well as explanations for why they chose the answer they did. Most interestingly, the explanations for why a fraternity was the most masculinity masculine least masculinity masculine was applied to different answers; for example, for the "most masculine" explanation question, an explanation along the lines of "they most embody toxic masculinity" was given for three separate fraternities. To conclude my presentation, opportunities for future research will be discussed.

Overall, fraternities develop very specific rules and standards by which to act and operate that build upon and promote hegemonic masculinity. In being a homosocial type of group focused on lifting up what is masculine and rejecting anything remotely feminine, fraternities have become systematic in portraying toxically masculine ideologies (Hulligan 2015) and by suppressing any members who try to speak out against it, they allow future members to learn and recreate exactly what they were socialized into. I was happy to see evidence of original research here.

Bird, Sharon

Ehrhart, Julie and Sandler, Bernice

Hulligan, Kevan

Kiesling, Scott Fabius

Martin, Patricia Yancy and Hummer, Robert A.

McCreaddy, Adam

Rhoads, Robert A.

Roychowdhury, Poulam

Wade, Lisa and Myra Marx Ferree

West, Lois