

THE TRENT SISTERS

Sororities have the potential to offer freshmen girls at American colleges and universities something special. No matter what factors play into our decision to join sororities—whether we are influenced to rush by a mother’s legacy, or a cousin’s pressure, or a high school acquaintance’s lavish and thrilling sorority life that we’ve spent the past two years Facebook-stalking, or a genuine interest in a chapter’s philanthropic focus—our reasons for rushing, on some level, stem from one key thing that we all so desire: a sense of belonging.

For many American students, college is their greatest lifestyle change thus far. Some have grown up with the stability of one hometown and one community that has allowed them to stay with the same people from childhood through high school, and others have been pushed across the country and forced to start fresh in their teenage years. But regardless of whether we fall into one of those categories or somewhere in between, college is a grand change. It’s not like starting at a new high school and trying to infiltrate cliques of lifelong friends only to be labeled as an outsider or rejected by jealousy and exclusivity. College is a place where everyone is new to everyone, and everyone is searching for a sense of security as we all, together, begin a new chapter in our lives.

In this exciting yet difficult time characterized by an uncomfortable period of adjustment, Greek Life offers us just that. Sorority rush navigates young women through potential communities to belong to and invites us into an environment where creating genuine friendships seems to be the ultimate goal. At large universities such as Michigan—where a class of 7,000 students allows us to meet a vast and diverse range of people, and making friends is so easy that it’s difficult—Greek Life relieves us of that daunting adjustment. As young American women go through sorority rush, meet girls, and build connections, we search for comfort, and we trust the girls whom we like to get along with other girls we will like. We count on them to select a pledge class of sixty-something like-minded individuals who might give us the security that we are so searching for. In a few short weeks, sixty of the 7,000 are cherry-picked for us, and we are hopeful that some of them will become our best friends in this community that innately demands a strong sense of “sisterhood.” This unfamiliar place might start to feel like a second home sooner than we can imagine. It’s enticing, isn’t it?

And, for some, that temptation is defined by more than that wish for solace and belonging. Sororities recruit similar individuals, and, with that, they gain collective reputations that are then highlighted in red and planted on the foreheads of the individuals who join them. Like any system, there is a hierarchy in those reputations, and we are thus placed on a level that can help define our feelings about our social worth in the eyes of ourselves and others. Being favorably recognized as a member of a “top” house can make us feel socially regarded as elite or important, and that recognition as part of something good or bad can make us feel good or bad for no good reason at all.

Katie Trent was a senior in Beta Delta when I was a freshman. In a sorority of over 200 girls, it takes commitment and interest—that most of us, frankly, cannot be bothered with—to get to know every sister on a personal level. As a freshman, I knew everyone in my own pledge class and most of the girls in the pledge class above me, but, as a busy student, connecting with over 200 girls exceeded my social priority. I would guess that I knew, or at least knew of, a combined total of about forty juniors and seniors in Beta Delta. I would have walked right past Katie Trent on the street.

I did, however, recognize her name, and I had a positive sentiment towards Katie. She was a sister of my chapter, and, therefore, I could trust that I should feel connected to her in some small way. After all, she and her friends recruited the juniors, who recruited the sophomores, who recruited my friends and me.

It wasn't until my junior year, however, two years after Katie had graduated, that I was forced to connect with Katie on a personal level. Katie had reached out to the other recruitment chairs of Beta Delta and me to enthusiastically recommend a freshman at the University of Michigan to our chapter: her younger sister, Sarah Trent. We offered immense gratitude and excitement that Katie—and two other members of her pledge class, including a former chapter president—had contacted us about Sarah, and we assured them that Sarah would have an especially wonderful experience while rushing Beta Delta.

As a national organization that was founded with values including sisterhood, leadership, loyalty, and character development, it is assumed that those values should be reflected in our recruiting process. We spend weeks planning for recruitment parties to ensure that every young woman going through recruitment at Beta Delta feels important and desired. We know that girls come to us seeking security and development during an unsettling time, and we exist to give them just that. We honor tradition. We honor legacy. We expect that we will always help a fellow sister, and we will always want the best for all sisters of Beta Delta. We care for and look out for each other—especially for those at our own University of Michigan Chapter of Beta Delta.

We received three letters from girls whom we knew that recommended Sarah Trent to Beta Delta. Her legacy status as an in-house-biological-sister was noted on her recruitment profile and well-ingrained into the brains of the recruitment team at the University of Michigan. However, despite this knowledge, despite Katie's contribution to our sisterhood, and despite the fact that these recommendations for a legacy came from the very girls whom we trusted to find us our own sisters—and thus lead us to the college experience that would bring us so much joy as to inspire us to direct the recruitment process—Sarah Trent was not invited back to the third or final rounds of recruitment parties at Beta Delta. And she didn't just slip through the cracks.

So, why would we ever intentionally drop Sarah Trent? Why would we betray a sister for no reason at all? Why would our advisor from Beta Delta's national organization allow us—or even instruct us—to do so?

CHAPTER SCORES

The rush process is not really something that any freshman girl going through sorority recruitment at the University of Michigan—or a Potential New Member (PNM), as Michigan's Panhellenic Association calls it—is taught to take lightly. Freshman year, before each round, my roommates and I would spend hours tearing apart our drawers to ensure that we would dress to impress, and, after each round, my cheeks hurt from over-smiling as to seem enthusiastic enough to receive many invitations back to the “desirable” chapters. I understood rush to be a competitive process, and I understood my competition to be well over 1,200 girls from all over the country; I had to ensure that I stood out. I knew that my messy dorm room and my swollen cheeks would be well worth it.

A mix of hope, relief, and disappointment characterized the stressful two and a half weeks that consisted of four long rounds of sorority recruitment. It was a nerve-racking time for those 1,200 girls and I as we worried about how we might become a member of the chapter of our choice. We didn't have a clue as to how the houses possibly kept track of 1,200 girls and remembered our names and faces well enough to be able to make decisions about our fate after five minutes of small talk, and discovering how that worked would be a long-anticipated revelation at the beginning of sophomore year.

During my sophomore year, the recruitment chairs of Beta Delta took themselves quite seriously in a way that I found both laughable and unsurprising as they told us that we had been scored, and that we would need to score girls, on a 1-10 scale of “how well the PNM fits into Beta Delta,” 1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest.

They said that this process of “Chapter Scoring” was confidential because it was prohibited by to Panhellenic bylaws, but they assured us that everybody did it. How else were all of the houses expected to keep track of so many girls? They explained it to us as necessary in helping each PNM find her home, and it was not meant to be malicious. Besides, it was the process that had connected us to a community of similar girls and had brought every single one of us to our closest friends.

As soon as PNMs left the Beta Delta house, the sisters would score us on that 1-10 scale, recap our conversation, and write down the name of a sister whom we were similar to in order to ensure that we would all meet like-minded individuals and have the best recruitment experience possible. It wasn't all that personally upsetting for us to hear because we all knew that we must have been high on the “how well does she fit in” scale, and that shared, comfortable energy allowed us to feel alright about the fact that we, too, would have to score girls. The scoring process ensured that no one

would slip through the cracks, recruitment would run efficiently, and everyone would end up in the best-fit chapter for them. The recruitment chairs assured us that it wasn't evil—it was essential.

But, they chose their words carefully. The recruitment chairs constantly reminded us that no one gets a score of “zero,” because every girl going through recruitment would fit in on some level. They drilled it into our heads, over and over again, that we were scoring girls on how much they reminded us of our current sisters rather than valuing them on our perceived quality of their individual character. It wasn't offensive because giving a girl a score of 4/10 wasn't declaring that she was a 4/10 individual, it was only suggesting that she would get along better with girls in a different chapter of our community.

They did tell us, however, to pay close attention to the column of the scorecard that asked which of our current sisters the PNM reminds us of. They told us that if we did not have an answer to this question, it was an effective indicator that Beta Delta was probably not the best place for her.

They didn't have to say it in a way that was more explicit or more vicious than that; they didn't have to tell us what it meant to be “similar to” or “dissimilar to” our current sisters; they didn't have to tell us exactly what quantified worth of membership in our undoubtedly yet indistinctly elite community.

Whether we admitted it to ourselves or not, we knew.

EXTERNAL PRESCORING

It's another one of those things that you just never really say aloud: one of those unspoken, unfortunate practices that seems so obvious, so inevitable, that admitting to it and dwelling on it is not worth the innate stress and remorse that is built into the act. It's teaching a course and knowing that the fingers typing away on the other side of the computer screen are not furiously writing down every key point of your lecture; it's grilling a steak and knowing of the journey that brought that steak to your barbecue; it's watching heads turn when your eight friends walk into a restaurant and knowing that the like way that people look at each of them is no coincidence.

You know what is happening, and you know it's wrong. But you aren't going to do anything about it. We like to believe that people are inherently good, and so these evils might not be so grave that they are worthy of attention.

There's a feeling of helplessness and triviality that comes with this perceived inevitability. We know that the students are texting, the cows are dying, and the sorority that promises lifelong sisterhood and camaraderie only accepts girls who fit certain social standards of what it means to be “beautiful.”

But, we won't waste half of the class punishing the students, we won't stop eating meat, and we won't try to take down a sorority that girls feel eager to be a part of. We have better things to worry about—bigger fish to fry.

It's easy to ignore the disruptive students because you know that their grades will pay the price. It's easy to forget about the cow because most people eat meat, and cows won't stop dying if you vow to give up steak. It's easy to overlook the offensive ways in which the sorority selects girls because it doesn't seem so intentional and so calculated. It seems that while appearances are valued in Beta Delta, they're not *everything*. It seems that while they're important, they're not the *most* important factor when deciding which girls to invite back to each recruitment round. It doesn't seem as though it's a vicious numbers game that ensures that girls who look a certain way are the only ones who have a chance of becoming a member.

And for some, it can be so easy to overlook that your extremely positive experience with the sorority makes you ignore it entirely, so much that you feel eager to become one of Beta Delta's three recruitment chairs in order to give back to the process that has brought you valuable, genuine friendships. It can be so easy to overlook that you find yourself becoming one of four people who is forced not only to grant it attention but also to lead it.

I don't really know how to describe my reaction upon discovering the details of the process in which I would need to take part at the beginning of my junior year. I guess I would say that I was surprised not by the qualifications but rather by the importance of them in deciding whether girls would be invited back, and, I was appalled but, admittedly, also flattered. It was clear from our wide mouths and our chorus of "you can't be serious" scoffs that my two fellow recruitment chairs, the chapter president, and myself were in a shared state of disappointment, disgust, shock, and strange amusement.

It wasn't so appalling only because I had learned that the process that had brought me to my closest friends was truly just a deliberate beauty competition or because girls' worth and value to this friendship-based organization was being quantified by physical appearance—the worst part was that I would have to lead it, and the national organization would tell me exactly how to do so.

I realized that I knew exactly what the recruitment chairs had meant when they said, "If you can't think of a Beta Delta she reminds you of, she probably doesn't belong here." How could she "remind us" of a current sister if all of our current sisters look a certain way, and she doesn't?

I realized that appearances factored into my decision-making even when I was not consciously admitting that to myself. I never would have allowed myself to even think, "I'm giving her a 4 even though the conversation was fine because she's not pretty enough to be in this house." I never would have admitted that the only reason I gave that girl whom I had a boring conversation with an 8 was because she was beautiful.

And now, a year later, I was telling the sophomores to score PNMs on a 1-10 scale of "how well the PNM fit into Beta Delta," knowing those scores to be completely meaningless.

I learned that Chapter Scores were only a mask: a way to avoid telling everyone what they subconsciously already partially knew. Beta Delta's national policy demanded that our decision to invite girls to the second round was determined completely independently of their time spent at Beta

Delta. It was determined by their "External Prescores" weeks before sorority recruitment even began.

And so it goes: 1,200 names fall off recruitment profiles and into the Facebook search bar, where we must ask a series of important questions, created by nationals, of her public photos that will determine her "External Prescore" on a scale of 1-10.

1. Is she naturally pretty?
2. Does she look like your current sisters?
3. Is she trendy?
4. Would you want to see her in your letters?

10: She's "ideally beautiful"—thin with silky hair, great style, and an appealing face—and therefore we want her in Beta Delta.

1: She is *definitely* not "pretty enough" to be in this chapter.

Sifting through Facebook profiles and attributing appearance-based scores to young women on a scale of 1-10 was the most dehumanizing experience I have ever had, and it perplexes me to this day why I didn't get up and walk away. I have always told myself that the same process, albeit superficial and corrupt, brought something so real into my life two years earlier. I have told myself that, that is enough to trump my guilty conscience because walking away would have meant turning against the process that has given me the closest friends that I have ever had.

I have reminded myself that doing it alongside my fellow recruitment chairs made it so much easier in a diffusion-of-responsibility type of way. I have found comfort in knowing that the shame was lessened because it was divided four ways, and it was instructed rather than decided. As we sat in that red room in the basement of the Beta Delta house, night after night, superficiality became a prominently normalized part of our routine, and the guilt began to fade. Together we sat, robotically putting numbers into the Prescoring document, as instructed by Jen From Nationals, who united us in this numb mindset where we just had to do our damn jobs—we had to separate our commitment to these positions from our humanity; we had to exist in this environment where this was not disgusting but rather simply what we had to do.

And so our initial benevolent rejection was slowly minimized.

We chose to manage recruitment because we wanted to repay Beta Delta for introducing us to girls who would always bring out the best in us.

And there we sat, bringing out the worst in each other.

And that was only the beginning.

COFFEE DATES

You would think that the worst is over. You would think that now that the External Prescoring process has ensured that all members of Beta Delta have met the distorted beauty requirements, the young women can exist in a world of ignorant bliss. The objectifying way in which membership to Beta Delta is granted should be complete. The girls do not know how they were selected, so they should be able to focus on finding friendship and security in this new chapter of their lives.

They had all been deemed pretty "good" enough to be worthy of joining Beta Delta's sisterhood, and beauty would no longer be a factor in explicitly quantifying their worth during their four years at Michigan.

That is, until the next year. And the year after that. And the year after that.

Each time I entered the Beta Delta basement to mindlessly follow orders and contribute to the External Prescoring process, I carefully left my humanity at the door. I reminded myself that these girls whom I was valuing on the most superficial of scales were only strangers to me. I tried to tell myself that it was no different than sitting beside my mother and sister watching the Academy Awards and commenting on how beautiful Nicole Kidman looked in that blue dress but how Emily Blunt had never looked worse. They were strangers presenting their best selves for the world to see.

Red carpets. Facebook profiles.

But, all of a sudden, they weren't strangers anymore, and the door wasn't heavy enough to lock my humanity outside.

In order to follow orders, I had to allow my moral brain to exist in an alternate universe where everything was secondary to beauty and that was the norm and that was valuable and that was guiltless.

Each year, during the Spring semester, Beta Delta's recruitment chairs send an email to the sophomore pledge class that includes a sign up sheet for "Coffee Dates" with the intention of getting the girls excited about recruiting a new pledge class in the Fall. The rush chairs tell the sophomores that they want to meet with them in small groups for about fifteen minutes just to learn more about their experiences with recruitment, how much they enjoyed the process, and, of course, what things they especially liked about Beta Delta's recruitment process or what other houses did better than we did.

They begin each "Coffee Date" by telling the sisters that everything we discuss there, and all recruitment discussions going forward, must remain confidential within the sisters of Beta Delta.

As a sophomore, I nodded compliantly. The rush chairs were stern in their demands, and so we let them set the serious yet excited tone to gossip about all things recruitment. They encouraged us to talk about our personal experiences with recruitment and to join in enthusiastically in agreement or

disagreement with each other. Their curious eyes lit up as we told them of Zeta Beta Gamma's truffle desserts and Pi Mu's heart-wrenching philanthropy presentation. Their fingers typed furiously as they sat opposite us.

They whispered through their smiles as we walked away.

A year later, it was my turn. And, like everything else, the Coffee Dates were lies and disguises.

The smiling former recruitment chairs finally let the four of us hear the whispers. They told us of the national policies that we would need to follow in order to be the most desirable chapter on campus. They told us that the superficial scoring—the messed up way in which we determined the value of potential sisters—didn't end upon membership; it just changed.

They told us that we would need to rank the current sisters of Beta Delta on a scale of 1-10 in order to determine their "recruiting strength." 30% of that score would be determined by how personable and outgoing they were and how positive they seemed about the recruitment process in general. 70% percent of that score would be their External Score.

They were all sisters, and their External Prescores had once been high enough to grant them membership. Their seven-and-above External Scores, however, had been relative to 1,200 PNMs. Now, we would need to score them relative to each other, and they couldn't all be scored highly—they couldn't all be equally worthy of meeting our most desirable recruits. So, we looked at our friends and sisters and belittled their worth into only numbers.

The Coffee Dates were only a discrete way to ask the vicious questions.

How much did you enjoy talking to girls while you were going through recruitment?

How much will girls enjoy talking to you during recruitment?

What other house would you have done if you hadn't done Beta Delta?

Did other "top" houses want you? In other words, did you "rush well"?

Whispering smiles

What's her External Score relative to the rest of the chapter?

These were girls I would enjoy these four years with. These were girls I would maybe one day ask for career advice or professional help. These were girls I would be connected to forever. These were some of my closest friends. Who was I to label them with numbers—numbers that would represent how pretty and how personable *I thought* they were that would thus define how well *I thought* they would be able to recruit new members into our "sisterhood"?

Who was I?

MATCHING

It was all a numbers game: an Excel document at a big corporate job, a data sort in a statistics class. Our friends and sisters were only numbers to be sorted and matched in order to optimize Beta Delta's "desirability." They were merely pawns whom we would use to perpetuate the carefully crafted, painfully superficial reputation as a "top" chapter in a community where "top" represents how badly girls want to join us and boys want to meet us. Where "top" reflects our physical appearances. Where "top" reflects an External Prescore of seven-and-above as labeled by shallow, heartless recruitment chairs.

Before all parties begin, the PNMs' pre-labeled score cards are hidden under the couches and in the drawers, so during the ten minutes between each round, the sisters can easily reach under their designated cushions and rank their girls on that 1-10 scale of how well she fits into Beta Delta. As PNMs eagerly line up alphabetically outside the Beta Delta door, the sisters then line up on the other side, prepared to pick up the right girl who has been pre-assigned to them. We tell the sisters that everything has been organized in our records so that we can keep track of everyone smoothly. We tell them that they absolutely cannot mess up their line order and that they must be sure to greet the right girl as the PNMs file through the door in order to keep the quick, ten-minute scoring break between parties as efficient as possible. As the chaotic, twenty-five-minute recruitment parties fly by, and 1,200 girls rotate through the Beta Delta door, we find one less thing to worry about. Our "random matching process" exists only to make the scoring process faster and the madness easier.

It was simple, but it was anything but easy.

And, sure as hell, it was anything but random.

It wasn't until I saw a matching document that it all started to make sense. No—not make sense, but the pieces just started to fit. It wasn't that I discovered why we were doing all of this, rather, I was just finally forced to visualize it all and see the numbers align.

The Beta Delta tens would meet the PNM tens. The Beta Delta threes would meet the PNM threes. We told the sisters that they couldn't mess up the lines because scoring would become too difficult between rounds, but the sisters *actually* couldn't mess up the lines because a PNM with an External Score of eight couldn't be recruited by a Beta Delta with a score of three. We were told that then, maybe, the eight wouldn't want to join Beta Delta, and we couldn't risk that.

The PNM threes were gone before they walked inside, and the Beta Delta threes were used to entertain them for those twenty-five minutes before we could right click on their cell in the External Prescoring document and press delete.

The next step was to form the sisters into "bump groups," or groups of girls who would meet the same PNMs and make decisions about them. All of the houses did it, and there was no shame in doing so. After all, everyone wanted to ensure that PNMs got a true feel for each house, and they wouldn't be able to do so after meeting only one sister. At Beta Delta, we told the girls that we grouped them in the way that we did in order to show PNMs that there was no "typical Beta Delta girl," and we were made up of young women from all different backgrounds and with varied interests.

And that's exactly what we did: we ensured that the girls in each bump group were "different" from each other.

We ensured that each bump group had a mix of girls from Florida and California and Chicago rather than having a bump group of girls who were all from Michigan. We ensured that each bump group had some louder girls who were fully of personality and also some more laid-back, easygoing girls. We ensured that each bump group had an even ratio of blondes to brunettes.

But among these "unique differences," there was one way that the girls in each bump group, without question, were *exactly* the same.

Bump Group 1 would include only sisters who were scored as nines and tens. Bump Group 14 would include only sisters who were scored as ones and twos.

And it didn't end there.

There was more organizing to be done in order to avoid the chaos that is 1,200 girls coming in and out of a sorority house for twenty-five-minute conversations in a span of eight hours. The sisters understood that the literal moving parts of this process had to be systematic as well. Specifically, each bump group would have a predetermined seat in an assigned area of the house so that the sisters and their PNMs would not have to run around in circles looking for an open place to chat. It made methodical sense, just as everything else did.

Bump groups 10-14 and their PNMs would sit on the hardwood chairs in the brown, empty dining room. Bump groups 4-9 would sit on the beige rugs and couches in the light, yellow living room.

Bump groups 1-3 would get comfortable on the couches in the smaller extra living room. The idea was that, in this enclosed space, PNMs would look around at the room full of pretty Beta Delta girls, and the pretty PNMs whom they were rushing, and admire these girls who might all become their sisters.

The chaos that we worked so hard to control fiercely returned during the ten-minute scoring break between each round. The Living Room Girls would whisper-shout about girls they wanted as their "little sisters," and the Dining Room Girls would stare enviously and whine about how they hadn't met anyone "good" yet. It didn't take more than a few rounds for the Dining Room Girls to figure out that they had not met and might not meet a single girl who "reminded them of their current sisters."

It didn't take more than a few rounds for them to figure out that no one whom they would speak to would be invited back to the next round.

They noticed that if and when they did have the opportunity to recruit girls who might become sisters of Beta Delta, it was only when the lines got messed up, and they picked up the wrong girl.

FLAGGING

You thought it ended there, didn't you?

It couldn't possibly get any more calculated or ridiculous or laughably shallow. But it can. It always can.

That brings me to "Flagging." Yes—another dumb name for another dumb process. Another euphemism. Like "Coffee Dates." Or "External Score."

Or "Does she remind you of your current sisters?"

As PNMs entered the loud house full of screaming and cheering sisters, Jen From Nationals stood behind the chanting sisters with her clipboard and completed the nationally-ordered process of Flagging. The clipboard had a list of the names of all the girls who were coming that party, and as they walked through the door, Jen looked at their faces and their name tags and took notes next to their names: " ", "CG," or "MG." Those labeled as "stars" were classified as beautiful, deserving of receiving a bid, and in need of meeting our strongest recruiters. Those labeled as "CG" were not "bad-looking" and "Could Go" if enough PNMs were prettier, and thus more deserving of an invitation to the next round. Those labeled as "MG" absolutely "Must Go." No questions asked.

During the parties, there were so many things going on, and everyone was invested in their own conversations and obligations. No one would ever notice. I surely didn't until I had to.

The twisted idea behind this process, like the others, is that people often present their best selves online, and sometimes, girls look different in person. Therefore, External Scores based on Facebook profiles are not always the most accurate way of judging appearances.

We were taught to think of Flagging as "double checking."

It worked both ways. Sometimes, girls looked better in person than they did online, and we needed to take notes to ensure that those girls were "saved" and rushed "harder" in rounds going forward. Flagging was our way of saving the pretty girls from the dining room and ensuring that everyone in the living room was worthy of being there.

"Saving" the "worthy" PNMs wasn't always as simple as bumping a star's External Score up to where it belonged and vowing to rush her like the queen that her appearance suggested that she was.

The matching process failed us one or two out of every five recruitment parties. We could never figure out why it was so difficult for the sisters to know their correct places in the lines and meet the right girl.

But that's when it became our responsibility to "save" the "good" PNMs from the detrimental experience that would be ending up with the wrong sister in the dining room.

As the recruitment team, we had to ensure that the star PNMs would have the best recruitment experience possible. They had to meet our strongest recruiters, and as the rush team, it was our responsibility to meet all star PNMs and make final decisions about them. If a star had been picked up by the wrong sister, it was especially important that we invade their conversation, force our "favorable" energy into what was thought to be an unfavorable situation, and avert the "crisis" that was a four recruiting a nine.

Sisters were often flattered when we wanted to come and join their conversations. Very few actually realized how incredibly offensive it often was.

Flagging was a little easier to deal with because I wasn't the one doing it; this one was entirely in the hands of nationals.

But that's mostly because they didn't trust us and feared that our moral judgment could allow us to manipulate this part of the process. Rightfully so.

This was the once place where nationals could catch us if we had discreetly changed a PNM's Prescore in the Google Doc because we had heard great things about her and wanted to push her through even though she was thought to be externally unworthy of an invitation.

And that's just what we did, and nationals definitely caught it.

Bridgette Murphy was on Michigan's women's soccer team. Two of her closest friends from high school had joined Beta Delta during their freshman year at Michigan, but Bridgette hadn't yet rushed because she wasn't sure if it would work with her athletic schedule. Because of her high school friends, however, Bridgette quickly found a community within Beta Delta, and she was "socially" considered a sister by many of the girls. She even decided to rush sophomore year solely for the purpose of officially joining Beta Delta, and her twenty close friends in the chapter would make sure that it would happen for her. In the Prescoring Google Doc, we easily made her External Score a seven so that we, too, could make sure that it would happen for her.

But Jen flagged her as a "Must Go."

We told Jen that we had no choice. If we dropped Bridgette, the sophomores would know that we were manipulating the Chapter Scores behind closed doors, and they would revolt against us and tear us apart. The motives of Beta Delta would be called into question, and the sisterhood would collapse. Bridgette was friendly with everyone in their pledge class, and her chapter scores were tens across the board. Everyone knew that.

As if Jen didn't already have enough power, she had the laptop with the national software that made all the final decisions about potential recruits. And despite Bridgette's manipulated External Prescore, Jen insisted that we couldn't give her a bid because her true External Score was "more like a four."

We fought back, insisting that it would become a national problem if she were dropped, and we promised that we would only try to override the policy about External Scoring just this once.

And we won that battle. We finally had the courage to fight back against the superficial corruption that tried to control us, and we made it happen.

But we only fought for this one because dropping her would have been too great of a risk, and we had to give her a bid in order to save face with the chapter and prevent another uproar.

THE UPROAR

We were able to keep the sophomores in the dark. We had practice; we had learned the hard way that we would need to be craftier.

During my sophomore year, we all knew that something was up. 1,200 PNMs came through in the first round at Beta Delta, but only twenty-five of us were meeting the "top" recruits while the other forty of us were meeting girls whom we knew wouldn't be invited back. It wasn't hard to figure that out.

And the following rounds of recruitment would be so much worse.

During that first round, the Dining Room Girls were used to entertain the threes. But by the second round, 800 PNMs were gone, and we only had 400 left to entertain. And, with that, we had far fewer girls coming to each recruitment party; we definitely did not need all sixty-five sophomores to rush PNMs. We only needed the top forty.

And, by the third round, we only needed the top twenty-two.

By the final night of recruitment, some of the Living Room Girls were stressed that their favorite girls might pick a different house. They were stressed about which of their "rush crushes" they might choose to be their little sister if they all joined Beta Delta.

The Dining Room Girls were stressed that they hadn't met a single girl who was still in the running to join the sisterhood.

We all knew that something was happening behind those closed doors, but we just didn't realize how deliberate it was. We knew that Bump Group 1 had "stronger" recruiters than did Bump Group 14, but we didn't realize that, that "strength" was a calculated number or that it was defined in *this* way. We didn't realize that our uncontrollable appearances were being carefully scored as if we were gymnasts who had spent months perfecting a tumbling routine on a balance beam, and we didn't realize that our nationals were the judges.

The women from nationals—women who would suspend our social lives or revoke our charter and take us down if we ever hazed our sisters in any way—were instructing us to lead this secret process of deeming each other pretty enough or too ugly to meet a star PNM.

But that's not hazing. Right.

During my sophomore year, I didn't realize how insanely personal it was.

I just thought that we talkative Living Room Girls were forced to recruit girls every single round because we enjoyed doing it. I thought they were making the extroverts do the busy work and allowing the more reserved girls to avoid eight hours of painful small talk. I thought they were splitting us up by girls who would want to partake in the bullshit and those who wouldn't.

It wasn't supposed to be so offensive. That's why the recruitment chairs didn't try to hide it at first.

But the Dining Room Girls were smart enough to see the truth.

After the third round of recruitment parties, my pledge class had a hateful and tearful meeting with the recruitment chairs, and our sisterhood would never recover.

The Dining Room Girls confronted the recruitment chairs, demanding that they reveal how they decide which sisters recruit the most and which sisters recruit which PNMs. The sisters demanded that they explain what makes for a "good rusher" and why every sister wasn't worthy of rushing equally.

The recruitment chairs didn't have any explanation.

We Living Room Girls joined our sisters and presented a united front in favor of equal opportunities to meet girls. Why wouldn't we? We didn't realize that our friends had been so offended, and we *knew* that we were all equally worthy of meeting PNMs.

But the Dining Room Girls silenced our "privileged" opinions and rejected our efforts to defend them. We followed orders and recruited girls round after round, and, to them, that made us just as bad as the superficial recruitment chairs.

The rest of the year would be the Dining Room against the Living Room. The sisterhood we had worked to build for the past year and the home and security we thought we had found had all collapsed in a process that was supposed to allow us to help a new group of girls find the warmth and comfort that we had found in Beta Delta.

Seventeen girls would disaffiliate from the sisterhood, declaring that upon recognizing that they had somehow been "ranked within [their] own pledge class," they had "no interest in being part of the superficial bullshit that is Michigan Greek Life."

A year before, we were strangers. A year later, we were sisters.

A year after then, we were strangers once again.

We needed to be craftier.

As recruitment chairs, one year later, we couldn't let this new pledge class be torn apart by the superficial demands of our national organization the way that ours had been. We had to make every single girl feel important. If we couldn't stop nationals from carrying this out, we had to prepare the sisters for it as best as we could. We had to try to find something good about all of this, and we had to draw it to their attention. It was like telling that little girl in the schoolyard that the boy who had been shooting spitballs at her had only been doing so because he liked her; we had to deceive them to protect them, and we had to hope that they would buy it. We had to have beautiful lies. We had to have better answers, and we had to blame nationals as much as they would let us.

We lowered their expectations in a way that had never been done before. From the first day of recruitment, we told the sisters that they would not all be rushing after the first round of recruitment. We assured them that this happened every year, and everyone still found her perfect little sister. We told them that, because we recruit so strongly, the Panhellenic Association gives us back very few girls each round compared to other houses. We reminded them to be flattered: more girls wanted to join us, so we didn't need as many "second choices" as other houses did. We told them that we could only have as many girls placed in bump groups as we had PNMs coming to each party. As badly as we wanted everyone to have an equal opportunity to recruit girls, nationals told us that when other chapters of Beta Delta tried to do this, by having alternating bump groups for example, it became too complicated to keep track of who was rushing each party and where the bump groups were supposed to sit. We told them that determining which sisters would participate in rush every round was, of course, random.

We got rid of the chronologically worsening number scale that made the bump groups so obvious, and we replaced the numbers with colors. *Not* in ROY G BIV order: Bump Group 1 was "White." Bump Group 2 was "Teal." You get the idea.

We used those times when the lines got messed up to our advantage. When a three accidentally recruited an eight, and I would join the conversation to "save" her, I would make sure to go up to the sister in between rounds and ask, "What did you think of her? She seemed awesome right? You guys were having such a great conversation, and I'm so happy you rushed her!"

And it worked. That pledge class never asked questions. They knew from the get-go that there was a high chance that they wouldn't be able to recruit girls, they didn't know that "Teal" was "better" than "Red," and every sister had her shining moment when she felt that she was an important part of the recruitment process. That pledge class lived happily ever after.

The one question we still couldn't answer was the question that no one felt comfortable asking anyway.

How come we've only met ugly girls while they've only met pretty girls?

No one feels comfortable saying that aloud. No one feels comfortable asking a question that is so insanely and embarrassingly shallow. By now, I am sure that you've sensed my discomfort as I struggle to find the best way to say these things. It hurts to write, and I wince each time I read it back to myself. Even if you're in a closed space where you leave your morals at the door and are asked to trade them for superficial judgment, it's hard to say to someone else and even harder to admit to yourself to begin with. It's impossible to find words that don't make me feel so stupid and so cruel. Because I *was leading* something so stupid and so cruel.

Who am I to define what it means to be "pretty"? I don't know how to describe what I was "looking for" when I was trusted to rank Facebook profiles and granted authority to distinguish a ten from a four from a two. It's disgusting and embarrassing and nonsensical and complicated. Too complicated.

Or is it too simple?

I always think about why I did it.

Some mornings, you wake up in a sweat with so many questions about that person from your dream—that abstract version of yourself who made all of those strange decisions that could never possibly reflect how you really feel about yourself or your life or the people in it. You ask who the hell your subconscious thinks she is, making those ugly choices and creating this bizarre figure who distorts your character. You ask your mind where that girl came from, and you disregard her, for she could never represent any version of your truth.

I talk about myself, the recruitment chair, in the third person as though she is that imaginary figure from a bad dream whose confusing motives couldn't possibly represent any version of my own. I separate myself from that heartless girl in the Beta Delta basement: the girl who attributed worth to surface-level characteristics; the girl who put numbers on faces and bodies and who took numbers away from girls with unique hairstyles or unusual piercings; the girl who said that Bump Group 3 had "too many brunettes"; the girl who forced one of her closest friends to recruit girls even though she had a job interview the next day because we "needed" her in Bump Group 4; the girl who told sisters to brush their hair, put on some makeup, and go on "runs" in Beta Delta tank tops around the freshman dorm neighborhoods in early September; the girl who instructed the videographer to re-edit the recruitment video to exclude a scene that featured a sister with braces; the girl who thought, "Oh, this isn't good" instead of "I am so incredibly sorry to have done this to you and to have made you this upset" upon receiving Katie Trent's hurt, scathing email.

I separate myself from that shallow idiot because I refuse to believe that any part of my subconscious could ever support her actions. I've spent the past two years struggling to find a healthy relationship with the girl who blames nationals and who recognizes herself as a mere pawn instead of as an active player. It helps in my reflection as I fight to assume the responsibility that I so badly wish to deflect.

I always think about why I did it.

I always say that I put my values aside, but I don't even know if that truly encapsulates what I really did. I actually allowed this job description to invite these values that I didn't even know I had to surface and to dominate. I reflect on that moment when I was first informed that the Chapter Scores and the conversations were a scam, and I think about the rush of guilt that overcame me when I discovered that I would have to bite my tongue and lead this against my better judgment.

I think about how I not only was able to swallow my guilt to assume the position but also was able to successfully omit guilt from my emotions so much so that I eventually felt comfortable fueling the twisted fire.

I can't believe that I have been a part of this. I can't believe that the organization really demands this.

I can't believe that we really demand this.

I can't believe that we require the sisters to share the link to the Beta Delta Tumblr across their social media profiles, telling their "friends" to "Check out [their] awesome sisters!" I can't believe that the Tumblr includes hundreds of pictures of our sisters posing alone rather than together. I can't believe that those pictures are not from sorority-affiliated sisterhood or philanthropic events. I can't believe that our Tumblr does not ask that viewers look at the great things that we are achieving together but rather that they just look at us, individually. I can't believe that, that alone can make girls yearn to join us.

I can't believe that we send a PowerPoint to the fraternities to introduce them to the new pledge class each year. I can't believe that, that PowerPoint includes sixty-something slides solely of names and photos of our new members and no other information about them. I can't believe that the four of us and Jen From Nationals spent hours crafting that PowerPoint, carefully selecting the best photo of each new member to show off to our world. I can't believe that, that PowerPoint of nothing but head shots and names gets responses that Beta Delta "got the 'best' pledge class" and "is the 'best' sorority."

I can't believe that desirability is defined in this ridiculous way. I can't believe that women value themselves and each other by how attractive they are to others and soak up that attraction and vie for that reputation. I can't believe that an organization founded to create bonds of sisterhood required that we drop a sister of Beta Delta's biological sister because we exist in a world where simply seeing Sarah Trent in our letters might not sufficiently convince a PNM that she needs to wear those letters too.

I can't believe that the national organization demands this because we demand this.

I always think about why I did it.

I think about why I agreed to treat other girls in this way and contribute to a process where worth of young women is quantified almost entirely by appearances. I ask myself why I allowed this to persist instead of refusing to take part in this. I ask myself why I didn't publicize this hidden information, especially since doing so would likely result in repercussions that would force the organization, and others like it, to put an end to this corruption.

I always say that I agreed to this because I didn't want to be a hypocrite. And I stand by that—it's definitely part of it. A woman with a clipboard once decided that I was pretty enough to be a part of this. She decided that my appearance fit the obscure criteria that defines who is worthy of membership. A woman with a clipboard once decided that my sisters—some of the closest friends I have ever had, people who understand and accept me in ways that I didn't know that friends could, and the first people to show me that friends can actually be as important as family—were worthy of membership too. A woman with a clipboard once decided that we should find each other, that we should learn and love and grow together, and that we should forever change each other's lives for the better.

And that was true of the rest of the Greek community. A woman with a clipboard sent other girls somewhere else. She sent them to find love and belonging even if it was not within Beta Delta. Even if they didn't receive that sense of social validation that came with the Beta Delta label, they would soon realize that they didn't need it. Initially, the label plays a disturbingly large role in the recruitment process for some; that part, by nature, comes before we all have the opportunity to find trusted, valued friendships in the sisters who are selected for us. After the first year or two, however, the desire for that label dissipates and is overwhelmingly replaced by a sense of love. Most of us across the community find a home in each other that trumps anything that we ever thought we wanted. We find something deep and real to replace our shallow desires.

I know that as a member of this "desirable" community, I cannot speak objectively. But I can try to convince you to see the credibility in my claims by telling you this: my friends and I haven't sported Beta Delta apparel or gone to a Beta Delta event in two years. If anyone ever asks us what chapter we're in, we tell them that it doesn't matter. We don't want the label because it does not and should not define us or anyone to anyone at all.

I have found comfort in disconnecting from that label—so much so that I finally felt ready to write this.

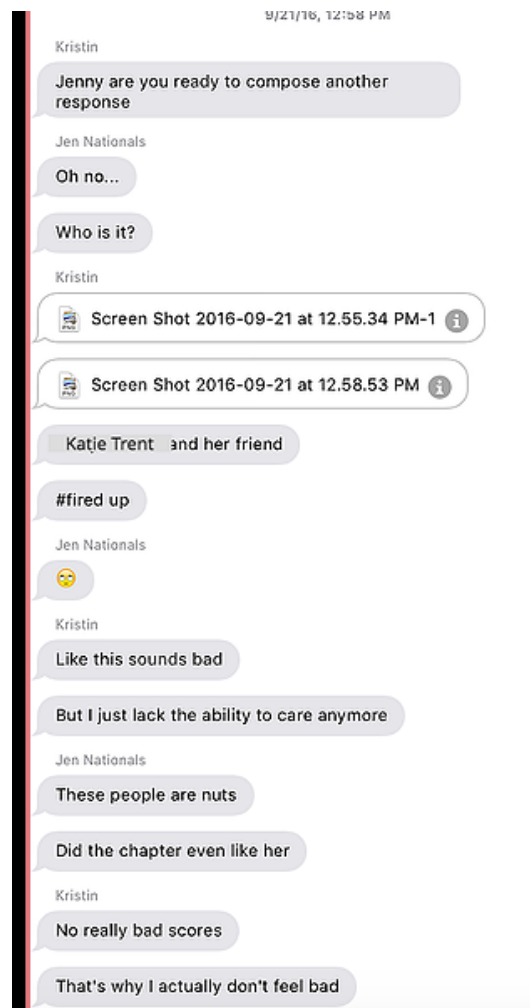
But I would be lying if I said I felt ready to share it. I would be lying if I said that there wasn't more to my reason for agreeing to contribute to this process. I would be lying if I said that my own selfish and personal concerns were not and are not perhaps the largest factor of all.

I don't know if I even knew that I had been feeling this way until I began to write it down. My guilty sense of hypocrisy as a result of the genuine friendships I have found was not the only thing that kept me going as Beta Delta's recruitment secrets were revealed to me in blunt and disturbing fashion. I wanted this to stop. I wanted the superficial motives behind the entirety of this national Greek system to collapse. I wanted someone to expose this in a way that would demand reform of "the superficial bullshit that is Michigan Greek Life."

I just didn't want to be that someone.

I didn't want to reveal this and to have Beta Delta's charter revoked by the Panhellenic Association due to a blatant violation of recruitment policies. I didn't want to ruin my sisters' social lives as they knew them. I didn't want my current sisters to hate me for doing so. A few years prior, I wanted to walk around campus with the Beta Delta label. Now, I *really* didn't want to walk around campus with the girl-who-took-down Beta Delta label. There was no way for me to take down Beta Delta without going down along with it. I wasn't ready to do that to my current sisters. I wasn't ready to do that to myself.

I'm still not ready. Not yet.



Kristin

ok fine

to Katie:

Hi Katie,

Thank you so much for reaching out about Sarah. We want to begin by ensuring you that this was in no way an easy decision. We so appreciate all the information you provided to us about your sister, as it is clear that she is an amazing individual. Her picture page was hung for all our members to see and her recommendations were absolutely taken to heart. As we're sure you know, firsts and second rounds are rarely anything but randomly matched regarding who is rushing who. In the case of your sister, however, we matched to the best of our ability with her interests, personality, and more, all based on the information provided from you and the other recommendations. We truly wanted to give her the most incredible experience and we hope that we did that. This is of course our hope for any PNM, but particularly that of a legacy to the chapter.

This being said, we also have to give a voice to the members currently inside of our chapter. We cannot thank all the pledge classes before us enough for their hard work and dedication to our home, for it would truly be nothing without you all. On the other hand, we cannot simply disregard the voices of current members, either. We need to be clear in stating that in no way does this decision reflect on the character of your sister, because we know that every girl going through recruitment is an amazing individual deserving of a home. However, the members that rushed her believed that there was a more perfect fit for her elsewhere in the greek community.

After four years of recruitment, we know that you are fully aware of how difficult of a time this is for both potential new members and active members alike. We are extremely confident that Sarah will find her home on campus, just like you had the opportunity to years ago. We again cannot thank you enough for your dedication over the years and wish your sister the absolute best with the few days left of recruitment to come.

Best regards
The Recruitment Team

Awesome

Jen Nationals

That was beautiful 🥰