

# ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY OF SORORITY WOMEN: THE INTERPLAY OF BELONGING, APPEARANCE, REPRESENTATION AND INSTITUTIONAL MEANING

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## ABSTRACT

In this project, I explore the connections sorority women on a large college campus create between their appearance, sorority membership, sense of belonging, and identity. By interviewing twenty members of ten of the University of Missouri's fourteen sororities, a fuller picture of the interplay between appearance and sorority identity emerged.

While sorority women are often stereotyped as shallow and conformist, based largely on the perceived focus on consumption and appearance, as discussed by Robbins (2005), my research reevaluates the utility and motivation behind sorority women's use of clothing, styles, and consumption. Rather than being illustrations of groupthink or conformity, sorority women's use of symbols, brands, styles, and language serves to construct a complex set of rules designed to facilitate belonging, both within the sorority system and on campus as a whole. Through the use of certain modes of appearance, consumption patterns, and prescribed actions, sorority women indicate their willingness to adhere to their organizations' stated and unstated values systems. The interplay between appearance, consumption, organizational identity, and belonging shapes the sorority experience along multiple dimensions.